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TENNYSON

3

THE STORY OF HIS LIFE

BY

EVAN J. CUTHBERTSON

AUTHOR OF
'WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: THE STORY OF HIS LIFE AND TIMES'

Illustrated

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PREFACE.

The Life of a great man cannot be written in one, or even in many, biographies; and it is only after the task has been frequently attempted that a measure of success is attainable. Not until we have become thoroughly acquainted with a man's outer life can we with confidence lift the veil, and, entering the inner sanctuary of his being, seek somewhat to understand the secrets of his soul, and learn how they dominate his thought and influence his work.

The Life of Tennyson is no exception to this rule. The following pages aim at nothing more than a plain narrative of his life, which may be useful and interesting to those to whom his son's *Memoir*, splendid monument as it is to his greatness, may not be available. If there lives and moves through this volume Tennyson, the child, the youth, the man—Tennyson as he appeared from day to day to his friends and associates—then the writer has accomplished his purpose; and he leaves to abler and more ambitious pens the attempt to expand and annotate the deepest life of the Poet as he wrote it for the world in *Merlin and The Gleam.*

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER PAGE

I. EARLY SUMMERS 9

II. THE TUMULT OF THE HALLS 24

III. MY FRIEND, THE BROTHER OF MY LOVE 32

IV. MELODY DEADENED 42

V. MELODY WAKENED 55

VI. ANNUS MIRABILIS 66

VII. BY THE QUARRIED DOWNS OF WIGHT 78

VIII. FROM MAGIC CASEMENT 93

IX. THE LONG AFTERNOON 109

X. SUNSET AND EVENING STAR 122

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

Lord Tennyson .... *Frontispiece*

PAGE

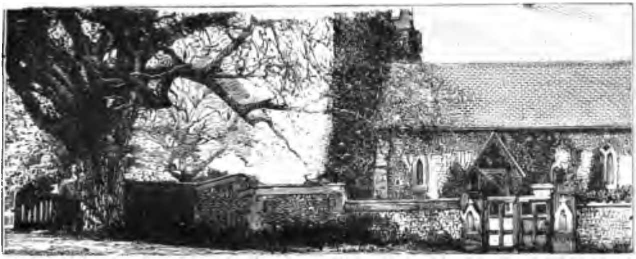
Somersby Rectory, Lincolnshire 17

Shiplake Church 70

Farringford, Freshwater, Isle of Wight 85

Aldworth House, Sussex 101

Lady Tennyson 114



TENNYSON.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY SUMMERS.

THE year 1809 was destined to bequeath great riches to the coming Victorian age: riches to the State, to science, and to literature, and to the whole of mankind. For within its compass it held the birthday of William Ewart Gladstone, one of the century's greatest legislators; of Charles Robert Darwin, the leader of evolution; and of Alfred Tennyson, whose genius has enabled him above all his contemporaries to voice in song the spirit of his time. Three other children of that remarkable year who were born and grew to fame in the New World were Edgar Allan Poe, in Tennyson's eyes the 'most original American genius;' Oliver Wendell Holmes, the author of the *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table;* and Abraham Lincoln, the great American President. One hundred years earlier was born Samuel Johnson, and just half a century earlier Robert Burns;

but while it was 'a blast o' Januar' wind blew hansel in on Robin,' Tennyson came to earth a child of summer days, and first saw the light on the 6th of August.* It was indeed a summer's birth into a summer home; for the quiet village in which stood his father's rectory had long ago got from some descendants of the wandering Norse its name of Somersby (or Summer-town), because, it was said, birds and flowers seemed to tell how the sun lovingly lingered over it. By all accounts, a right sturdy babe was Alfred; at least if we are to accept as biographical the Doctor's wager in *The Grandmother* that not a babe had such a leg in twenty parishes round.

Somersby is, in Lincolnshire, commonly accounted 'a flat, malarian land of reed and rush.' But the county is not all flat; and though along the coast stretches a line of low-lying marshes—long tracts from which the sea is barely kept out by means of earth-embankments—and in the south what still remains of the fens, yet the western side—from the Humber in the north, through Lincoln to Grantham in the south—consists principally of light uplands; and away in the north lie the Wolds, gray downs of chalk, belted with wood and dotted with 'thick-fleeced sheep from wattled folds.' The little hamlet has been described by a Lincolnshire rector † as a quiet, wooded village at the foot of the South Wold; the country about it soft and pastoral, with small villages lying close together. Horncastle and Spilsby are the neighbouring towns, the nearer some seven miles away. Half-a-score of cottages around a tiny church and rectory, a cure of less than eighty souls, almost completely cut off from the outside world, so that the news of Waterloo did not reach it till long after the battle had been fought—such was Somersby in 1809. To-day the population has sunk to forty, and it is still a sequestered spot, six or seven miles from a railway station, itself only reached after a tedious journey chiefly remarkable for its 'changes.'

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* Tennyson's birthday is frequently stated to be the 5th of August owing to the figure 6 in the Baptismal Register at Somersby having been mistaken for a 5 on account of the fading of the ink on the left side of the loop. He was born on the 6th, just after midnight, and it was on this day that his mother was wont to keep his birthday.

† The Rev. D. Rawnsley, a connection of the poet's by marriage.

Like many notable Englishmen before him, Tennyson was a son of the parsonage; and the white-walled rectory of Somersby, quaint and rambling, with its mediæval-looking dining-hall built by the poet's father, its long, pointed, and stained-glass windows suggestive of a chapel rather than a modern dining-room, was an ideal home for the infant poet. The front of the house was separated from the road only by a narrow drive, but at the back the lawn sloped down to an old-fashioned garden. There were—

The seven elms, the poplars four,
That stand beside my father's door.

'The poplars four' are long since gone; but the trim parterres and sweet-scented flower-beds still remain, giving to the place a delightful air of old-world-ness. It is a beautiful house, situate in a beautiful spot. 'Fifty years hence people will make pilgrimages to this place,' confidently asserted Arthur Hallam in 1832; and to-day the visitor to Somersby is shown—or can find out for himself—innumerable little 'memorials' of Tennyson.

Tennyson's father, Dr George Clayton Tennyson, 'the stern Doctor,' as his parishioners were wont to call him, was a man of marked physical strength and stature; accomplished in the fine arts, music especially, and in language; imaginative in his temperament, and verging at times upon gloom. Possessed of many diverse talents, he never gained the fame that is won only by concentration of purpose; but he was all the fitter to be the tutor of his children. The austerity of the man was perhaps not altogether natural, but to some extent acquired. From an ambitious caprice he had been disinherited by his own father, and the sense of injustice rankled in and embittered his nature. 'High-souled and high-tempered' was a friend's estimate of Dr Tennyson. Incumbent of Benniworth, vicar of Grimsby, and holder also of the livings of Wood Enderby and Somersby, a plurality of parishes given to him in lieu of an inheritance, Dr Tennyson had no real calling for the ministry of the Church, and the story is told of a venerable parishioner of the Doctor's, who, when asked how he used to preach, replied, 'Ee read um from a päaper, an' I didn't knaw what um meant.' Yet the poor were fond of their stern and melancholic pastor, and would do anything for him. How large a place he had in his son Alfred's affections is seen in the *Lines to J. S.*, published in 1832.

Alfred Tennyson used to tell a story of his father's stay in Russia when a young man, how at dinner one night at the English minister's at St Petersburg he said to his host across a Russian, 'It is perfectly well known in England who murdered the Emperor Paul [who was strangled in 1801]—it was Count Pahlen;' how, after dinner, the ambassador drew him aside and whispered, 'Ride for your life: the man across whom you were speaking was the Count whom you accused of murdering the Emperor;' and how Dr Tennyson took horse and rode for weeks, falling ill in the Crimea, and reaching England only after many adventures and much suffering.

The Tennysons came of an old and noble stock. In the Life of his father, the poet's son has given a pedigree which goes back as far as 1672; and their lineage was traced to the Plantagenets through the old Norman family of D'Eyncourt. The ancient peerage of D'Eyncourt had become extinct towards the end of the fifteenth century, had been revived by Charles I., and had died out again somewhere about 1750. To revive it seems to have been the great ambition of the poet's grandfather, a wealthy retired lawyer and proprietor of Baynes Manor, Dalby, in Lincolnshire, who claimed descent on the female side from both the families who had formerly held it; and it was with that end in view that the old man deliberately disinherited Tennyson's father, his eldest son, who was but a country clergyman, passing him over in favour of the younger son Charles, a stirring Reform politician, and on the winning side. But the best-laid plans often fail. The peerage was not obtained; and when in the whirligig of time it did come, it was for greater services to the world than even the promoting of an English Reform Bill, and—would the old lawyer had lived to feel the irony of it!—it went to the disinherited branch. Tennyson loved to think himself of Danish origin; and there is reason to believe that the oldest line of the family had first settled north of the Humber, in Holderness. There is a notice of a John Tenison in 1343.

The poet's mother was Elizabeth, daughter of the Rev. Stephen Fytche, vicar of Louth. Mrs Thackeray-Ritchie tells us how sweet and gentle Mrs Tennyson was. Her kind-heartedness, indeed, became proverbial; and the more unscrupulous, inhabitants, of the next village used to ill-treat their dogs in front of the windows of Somersby Rectory, in order that the gentle lady might bribe them to desist, or be induced to purchase the worthless curs at an exorbitant price. 'She was intensely, fervently religious,' adds Mrs Ritchie, 'as a poet's mother should be.' And we have Tennyson's own testimony as he turned away from her grave: 'She was the beautifullest thing that God Almighty ever made!' She had reached the great age of eighty-five when she died; and to this day, it is said, the aged and poor of the district still mention her name in tones of the most affectionate regret, and, half-mischievously, half-sorrowfully, hint at the tricks by which her kindness was imposed on.

In his poem of *Isabel*, Tennyson has more or less described his mother; and his son in his Life of his father records that she had been among the beauties of the county. When she was almost eighty, one of her daughters, believing the old lady to be too deaf to hear her remark, informed a small gathering of friends that twenty-four offers of marriage had been made to her mother. To the amusement of all present, Mrs Tennyson at once corrected her, saying emphatically, as if the true number was of great importance, 'No, my dear; twenty-five.'

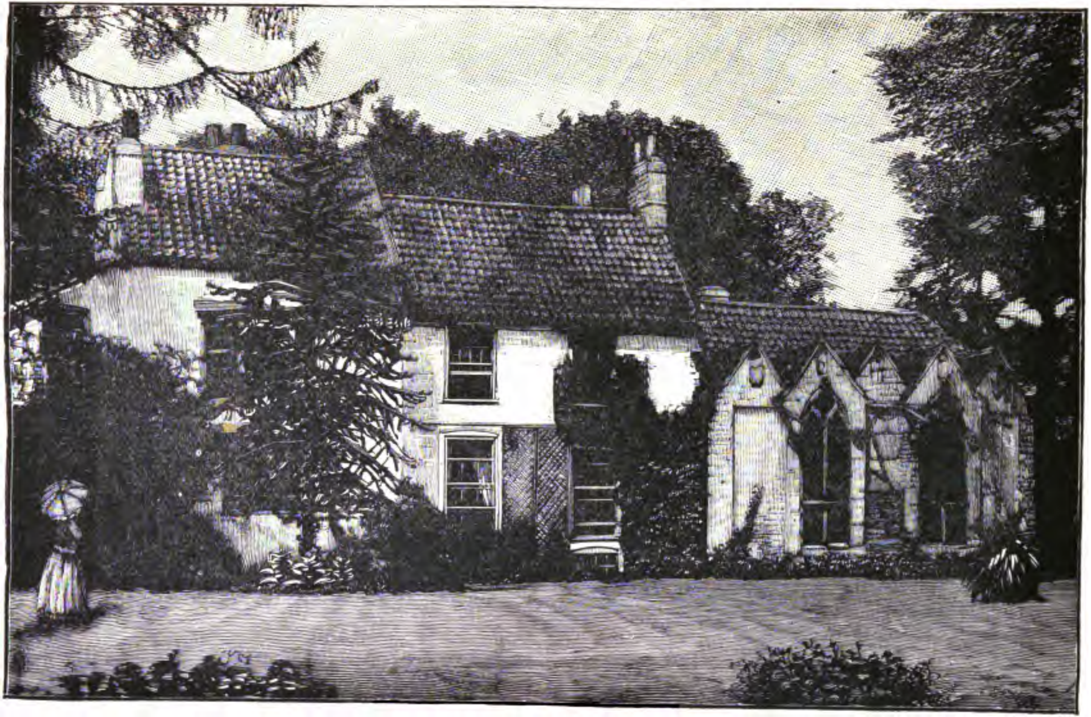
Dr Tennyson had married in 1805, three years before his presentation to the living of Somersby; and Alfred was a fourth child, the eldest having died in infancy. As the years went by the rectory rang with the laughter of many young voices. Twelve times in all did Dr Tennyson stand at the baptismal font—seven times with a son, five times with a daughter. A long-lived race were the Tennysons, for all except two have exceeded the threescore years and ten of man's allotted span. 'We Tennysons do not die,' remarked Emilia Tennyson—Mrs Jesse—when she herself was over eighty.

Johnson's pretty phrase about his own college, 'a nest of singing birds,' has been applied to the Somersby parsonage. Father and mother, brothers and sisters, they all were distinguished for their attainments; and in after-days Alfred's two elder brothers, Frederick and Charles, become notable as poets. Indeed, it is said that, among the children, Alfred appeared at the time the least remarkable. According to Susan Epton, the rectory nurse, the tender and laughing Charles was the village favourite. Of Alfred she used to remark, 'Powet or no powet, I 'se carried him on my back.' Cut off from the outer world, and with few companions of their own age and station in the neighbourhood, they created an ideal world of their own, a world in which Romance was king, and the armoured knights of old again went forth in search of deeds of derring-do. 'The boys,' Mrs Ritchie narrates, 'played great games, like Arthur's knights: they were champions and warriors defending a stone-heap; or, again, they would set up opposing camps with a king in the midst of each. The king was a willow-wand stuck into the ground, with an outer circle of immortals to defend him, of firmer, stiffer sticks. Then each party would come with stones hurling at each other's king, and trying to overthrow him.'

But books and not athletics were the favourite amusements of the Tennyson household, and those strong imaginative powers that crept into their outdoor games found freer play in the winter afternoons and evenings, when the shrill winds were 'up and away,' and the gusty poplars swayed and creaked in the garden without. Then it was that 'they became romancers, leaving the jousts neglected.' Long, endless tales and histories they told, Alfred's being always the most diffuse and unending. One story of his lasted for months, and was derisively nicknamed 'The Old Horse.' Nevertheless, he was looked on as the most thrilling story-teller of the family.

When seven years old Tennyson was asked, 'Will you go to sea or to school?' and he at once replied, 'To school.' And so at the Christmas term Dr Tennyson drove him into Louth, to the house of his grandmother; and his name was entered in the books of the grammar-school, the headmaster of which at the time was a Mr Waite, and his assistant a Mr Dale. Strictly speaking, it was not his first school, for, till they reached seven, Dr Tennyson sent his boys to Somersby village school in Holywell Glen, where 'a teacher named Cadney, within earshot of the noisy rookery, and under the shadow of the beeches, imparted the rudiments to the village boys and girls.' The school has long since been destroyed, and to-day hardly an inhabitant of Somersby can tell where it stood, or the name of the man who kept it.

At Louth, famed for its church, 'whose cold gray spire appears in the black outline of the trees,' Alfred remained four years. Quiet, uneventful years they seem to have been, leaving few memories behind other than a life-long hatred of the grammar-school. 'How I did hate that school!' he said not many years before his death; and his son relates that he always remembered sitting on the stone steps of the school on a cold winter morning, crying bitterly on account of a cuffing he had received from a big lad because he was a new boy. The Rev. Mr Waite, also, was a master of the old type, who knew of no other way of imparting instruction than through tingling ears and by aching bones. An incident of Alfred's school-life was his walking in a procession of boys decked with ribbon on the occasion of the coronation of George IV.; and he used to relate how an old woman had said that the boys made the prettiest part of the show.



Somersby Rectory, Lincolnshire.

One day, when he was five years old, and a storm was sweeping through the rectory garden, Tennyson ran from the house, and spreading his arms to the wind, cried out:

I hear a voice that 's speaking in the wind.

He recalls also that the words 'far, far away' had always a strange charm for him.* But it was at Louth that his gift for writing verses was first discovered. One Sunday afternoon, before leaving for church, his brother Charles, the elder of the two by about a year, put a slate into Alfred's hands and told him to write a poem in praise of flowers. This he did in blank verse, after the manner of Thomson, whose *Seasons* was the only poem he then knew. On his return Charles scanned the lines with critical eye, and pronounced the verdict, 'Yes, you can write.' When ten or eleven years old, Pope's *Homer's Iliad* became his favourite, and he wrote thousands of lines in the regular Popedian metre. At his grandfather's desire he wrote a poem on his grandmother's death; and the old man gave him half-a-guinea, remarking at the same time, 'Here is half-a-guinea for you, the first you have ever earned by poetry, and, take my word for it, the last.'

Tennyson left the grammar-school of Louth in 1820, when all but eleven years of age. He and Charles returned to Somersby, and for the next eight years the two lads were taught by their father; Frederick, the eldest son, having been sent to Eton. From their father, and from a Roman Catholic priest, they received a good if not a regular education in classics, while a teacher at Horncastle was engaged to teach them music; and, indeed, there was not a clever man in the country-side whose services were not called into requisition. In after-days Tennyson complained of the drilling he got in *Horace* and the consequent dislike he conceived for the poet; and his son records that he would lament, 'They use *me* as a lesson-book at schools, and they will call me "that horrible Tennyson."' Except at lesson-time, the rectory was Liberty Hall, and forth the brothers used to roam at all hours in sunshine or in starshine, it mattered not.

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* See the poem entitled *Far, Far Away.*

When he was between thirteen and fourteen years of age Tennyson wrote an epic of several thousand lines, '*à la* Sir Walter Scott,' full of battles, and dealing with sea and mountain scenery. His father was proud of it, and (true prophet of the future) said he thought the author would yet be 'one of the great in English literature.' After reading the earliest poems of Shelley the boy burned his epic.

From his mother Tennyson inherited a passionate love for animal life and her pity 'for all wounded wings;' and it is said that more than one gamekeeper vowed that if he caught 'that there young gentleman who was for ever springing the guns,' a ducking in the pond would surely follow. One night, as Alfred leant from his attic window, he heard the hoot of an owl, and answered back to the bird. So natural was his 'tu-whit tu-whoo' that the owl flew into the room and fed out of his hand. It was readily tamed, and was kept for long as a pet, till one day it was found drowned in a well, a sacrifice, it was supposed, to vanity. An echo of this incident may perhaps be found in the second of his songs entitled *The Owl.*

The impressions of youth are always the strongest; the scenes of boyhood become part of our very selves; and certain it is that the flats and wolds of Lincolnshire for ever dwelt in the memory of the poet, in that innermost unconscious memory that shapes and colours all our work whether we will have it or no. 'You may see in his verses,' wrote Carlyle to Emerson long afterwards, 'that he is a native of moated granges and green, flat pastures, not of mountains and their torrents and storms.' The greatest formative influences of life are not the things that bulk most largely, but those that occur most frequently; it is their incessant quality, their omnipresence, that renders them silent and unseen forces indeed. And so it is Lincolnshire we find in Tennyson's poems and not his father's classics. There are—

> The lone gray fields at night:
> When from the dry, dark wold the summer airs blow cool
> On the oat-grass, and the sword-grass, and the bulrush in the pool.

And there the little brook that, as was once finely said, purls in and out of the poet's verse till it has come to be regarded as an understood part of the landscape. Traces of it are to be found in *The Miller's Daughter* and *In Memoriam*. *Flow down, cold Rivulet, to the Sea*, is a poem made in its honour; while *The Brook* is an exquisite child of fancy that no doubt owes its birth to the poet's love of running water begotten in him by the soft music of the Somersby beck.

But Tennyson's early poetry is as full of 'heaped hills that mound the sea,' of 'sandy tracts and hollow ocean ridges roaring into cataracts;' and those word-pictures are reminiscences of the little seaside town of Mablethorpe, on the Lincolnshire coast, where the family spent part of each summer. There, like the lotos-eaters, when 'the charmèd sunset lingered low adown in the red west,' the lads must often have 'sat them down upon the yellow sand between the sun and moon upon the shore.' Alfred especially was passionately fond of the sea; and it is said that he once ran bareheaded all the way from Somersby to the seashore, drawn by the far-off music of its restless waves which echoed in his memory.

One can hardly imagine a more fitting boyhood for a great poet: the systematic and thorough-going education without the cast-iron routine of the public school, the days and nights of freedom on the wolds and in the woods, tempered by a steady drilling in mathematics and classics. The country folk, who saw but one side of the life, can only recall about Mr Alfred that 'he would sit on a gate gaumin' about him,' or go 'dawdlin' about wi' a book.' 'Tha owd Doctor' certainly made a stronger impression on the villagers than his more famous son. But, in those hours that were thus apparently idled away, the poet was growing up naturally and unconfined, and in the end the harvest was to be an hundredfold.

Two events of the poet's youth remain to be recorded. He was fifteen when news arrived of the death of Byron; and how he received the tidings he tells thus: 'Byron was dead! I thought the whole world was at an end. I thought everything was over and finished for every one—that nothing else mattered. I remember that I walked out alone, and carved "Byron is dead" into the sandstone.' It has been noted that, in Haddington, Jane Welsh, whom he was to know in later life as Mrs Carlyle, heard the news with similar emotion. 'If they had said,' she wrote, 'that the sun or moon was gone out of the heavens, it could not have struck me with the idea of a more awful or dreary blank in the creation than the words "Byron is dead!"'

The other event was the publication of the *Poems, by Two Brothers*. The enterprise seems to have been due to a lack of pocket-money, and to the suggestion of the rectory coachman and the confidential friend and adviser of the brothers, that they might earn something by selling some of the verses they were always making. A bargain was struck with Mr Jackson, the bookseller of Louth, who, to begin with, offered ten pounds, but ultimately gave twenty, for those early verses—ten pounds, however, being in books. So the grandfather's prophecy was already falsified; but by this time he himself had said, 'If Arthur die, one of our greatest poets will have gone.' An uncle at Tealby, however, was not yet propitiated. 'My nephew,' he growled, 'has made a book of poetry; I 'd a deal rather heard of his making a wheelbarrow.' To-day a single copy of the book would fetch nearly as much as the brothers received from Mr Jackson. In 1892 the original manuscript was sold for £480. Frederick was an invisible third in the enterprise along with Charles and Alfred, at least four of the poems being by him. The modest motto chosen for the title-page was *Hæc nos novimus nihil esse* ('We know these things to be nothing'). Tennyson's son tells us that his father could hardly tolerate what he called his 'early rot,' but that latterly he said, 'Some of it is better than I thought it was.' There were various quotations from Addison, Byron, Moore, Scott, Cicero, Virgil, Sallust, Tacitus, and others, showing the boys' wide reading. The only criticism of the day is in the *Literary Chronicle* of May 1827: 'This little volume exhibits a pleasing union of kindred tastes, and contains several little pieces of considerable merit.'

Of *Poems, by Two Brothers*, almost nothing has been preserved in the later editions of Tennyson's works. But the same subjects seem to have occupied his thoughts, the same ideas and images to have presented themselves for years, until his fastidious mind had satisfied itself with the best possible expression of them. The germs of the *Dying Swan*, *Mariana*, and the *Ode to Memory* are found in this earliest volume; and streaks of a vein of thought cropping up, indeed, everywhere, that has since been elaborated and finished to perfection. The very epithets used in the first instance are sometimes retained in poems of a quarter of a century later; while in others the working out has been so complete that scarce a trace of the original, except in the subject, can be detected. Of other unpublished youthful poems of Tennyson's, Jowett, late Master of Balliol, has characteristically remarked, 'They are most original, and it is wonderful how the whelp could have known such things.'

On the afternoon of the publication Charles and Alfred hired a carriage with some of their earnings, drove over to the seaside, and kept a holiday triumph on the Mablethorpe sands.

This took place in 1827, and in a few months more Tennyson entered the university, a step further towards that goal about which he used to talk to his younger brother Arthur as they took long rambles together. 'Well, Arthur,' he had said most emphatically one afternoon, 'I mean to be famous.'

CHAPTER II.

THE TUMULT OF THE HALLS.

FROM Somersby to Cambridge—what a change! From the little sequestered village, with its sleepy bovine inhabitants, to the university town, aglow with the wit and intellectual brilliance of England. To lads like Charles and Alfred Tennyson, who had not passed through the intermediate stage of public school life, the transformation of scene must have been dazzling. To enter a university seems to a youth of imagination the most momentous step in life he has yet taken. He has not himself reached fame, but he is at the portals and has linked himself to the great men of the past. Their *Alma Mater* is now his; they belong to him, and he to them. It was with feelings akin to these that Alfred in 1828 went up to Cambridge, and entered Trinity—that mother of poets, Milton's college, and Byron's. Trinity was Frederick's college also, and he was already a distinguished student, having carried off the university medal for the best Greek ode on the Pyramids. Tennyson relates an amusing incident of his entrance into Cambridge. He and his brother Charles had got off the coach, and were walking down Trumpington

Street in the dusk, when a proctor accosted him: 'What are you doing without your cap and gown, sir, at this time of night?' To which Tennyson, somewhat nettled at what he conceived to be unwarranted interference, retorted, 'I should like to know what business it can be of yours, sir?' The next day Tennyson saw a young man whose face struck him so much that he said to himself, 'That is a man I should like to know; he looks the best-tempered fellow I ever saw.' It was Richard Monckton Milnes, for whom all through life he retained an affectionate regard. 'He always puts you in a good humour,' he was wont to say of Milnes.

The two brothers first lived in Rose Crescent, over a tobacconist's shop; but at the end of their first year they moved to lodgings in Trumpington Street, next door to the gate of Corpus. Entirely unaccustomed to social intercourse with men of their own age, they were, to begin with, painfully shy and nervous; and it is said that not once or twice they set out for college intending to dine in hall, but when they saw the crowded tables and heard the hum of conversation their courage failed them, and they hurried back to their lodgings dinnerless. It was on one such occasion that Dr W. H. Thompson, the late Master of Trinity, noticed Alfred standing, proud and shy, at the doors of the lighted hall; and asking a fellow-student his name, remarked, 'That man must be a poet.' No wonder that at first Tennyson did not take kindly to the university. He wrote home complaining that he felt isolated in the midst of society.

But if the shyness never quite wore away, the isolation did, and the poet soon made warm friends. He had the happy gift of gravitating to the right set, and it was a brilliant band that he and Charles joined—a rare body of men, many of whom were destined to after-prominence. Among them were James Spedding (author of the *Life of Bacon*); Richard Monckton Milnes, already mentioned (afterwards Lord Houghton); R. C. Trench (afterwards Archbishop of Dublin); Henry Alford (afterwards Dean of Canterbury); Brookfield Blakesley (afterwards Dean of Lincoln); W. H. Thompson, Master of Trinity; Stephen Spring Rice; Charles Merivale, Dean of Ely; J. M. Kemble; Charles Buller; R. Monteith; G. S. Venables; E. R. Kennedy; Edmund Lushington; and, above all, Arthur Hallam. Most of these were members of the society called 'The Apostles' when Tennyson joined it. Started some eight years previously, in 1820, and owing its inception in spirit, if not in form, to Frederick Maurice, this association, originally named the Conversazione Society, was limited to twelve members (hence its nickname), and attracted to its membership then, as (if we are not mistaken) it does still, the fairest promise of Trinity. In Tennyson's day it was a society of intellectual stalwarts who hated the narrow Toryism then so rife, especially in the country districts, and who sympathised with the emancipation of the middle classes. 'Commend me to the brethren,' once wrote Sterling of the 'Apostles' to Trench —'Commend me to the brethren, who, I trust, are waxing daily in religion and Radicalism.' There were daily gatherings of the society in the rooms of the various members, at which much coffee and tobacco were consumed; and there were also stated meetings set apart for essays and full-dress debates. 'Ghosts' was the subject of an essay written by Tennyson for the edification of 'the brethren;' but his son tells us that he was too shy to deliver it, and when the meeting gathered he tore it into pieces before them and threw the scraps into the fire. The preface alone has survived. In a letter to Mr Gladstone, Arthur Hallam gave his deliberate opinion that the effects produced on the minds of many at Cambridge through the society of 'The Apostles' was far greater than he dared calculate, and would be felt both directly and indirectly in the coming age. The eighty-seventh section of *In Memoriam* contains Tennyson's description of the gatherings in Hallam's rooms.

Fanny Kemble, who was in the habit of visiting her brother John, said of the poet: 'Alfred Tennyson was our hero, the great hero of our day;' and another description of him at college represents him as six feet high, broad-chested, strong-limbed, and with a Shakespearian face. At the meetings of the 'Apostles' he was backward of speech, sitting in front of the fire, smoking and meditating, getting rather than giving, but delighting, in his short, abrupt way, to sum up a discussion or clinch an argument. At times he was plunged into gloom and passed through 'moods of misery unutterable,' an inheritance, no doubt, from the stern Doctor.

Yielding to a wish of Dr Tennyson's, Alfred somewhat unwillingly patched up an old poem of his on *The Battle of Armageddon*, and sent it in to compete for the prize-medal of the Chancellor, which was to be awarded for the best verses on Timbuctoo. To his surprise, on June 6, 1829, he learned that he had outstripped Milnes, Hallam, and others, and had come in first. The event created no little stir, chiefly owing to the poem being in blank verse, for to win the prize in anything but rhymed heroics was an innovation; and, indeed, so unprecedented was the achievement, it was jestingly said that the prize had fallen to him by a blunder, a mark of exclamation being taken to denote approval. Though not a favourable specimen of

Tennyson's genius, the poem contains many pictures of dazzling colouring, and is remarkable as the work of a young man of twenty. On July 22 it was noticed in the *Atheneum* (probably either by John Sterling or Frederick Maurice, at that time its joint-editors) with the most marked favour. The critique runs as follows:

> We have accustomed ourselves to think, perhaps without any very good reason, that poetry was likely to perish among us for a considerable period after the great generation of poets which is now passing away. The age seems determined to contradict us, and that in the most decided manner; for it hath put forth poetry by a young man, and that where we should least expect it—namely, in a prize-poem. These productions have often been ingenious and elegant, but we have never before seen one of them which indicated really first-rate poetical genius, and which would have done honour to any man that ever wrote. *Such, we do not hesitate to affirm, is the little work before us;* and the examiners seem to have felt it like ourselves, for they have assigned the prize to its author, though the measure in which he writes was never before, we believe, thus selected for honour. We extract a few lines to justify our admiration. [Here fifty lines (62–112) are quoted.] How many men have lived for a century who could equal this?

With reference also to the same poem, Arthur Hallam wrote to Mr Gladstone: 'I consider Tennyson as promising fair to be the greatest poet of our generation, perhaps of our century.' Tennyson, however, declined to declaim his poem in the Senate House, his shyness overcoming him, and he succeeded in getting Charles Merivale to be his substitute. During his first year at college Tennyson had written *The Lover's Tale*, but it was not printed until five years later.

At Trinity at this time might have been seen a tall, thin, large-eyed, full and ruddy faced man, with an eyeglass fixed *en permanence.* In an entirely different set from

Tennyson, he also was destined to be a literary giant of the century; and it is interesting to notice how his powers were called forth by the Chancellor's prize-poem. In *The Snob*, a little periodical run by the wags of the undergraduate world, William Makepeace Thackeray has some burlesque verses on Timbuctoo, which, he explains, were unluckily not finished on the day named for closing the competition; and, as it would be a pity that such a poem should be lost to the world, they were inserted in *The Snob*, 'the most widely-circulated periodical in Europe.'

Tennyson was now hard at work at his heart's toil, and in the evenings a chosen few would gather in his rooms to listen to his latest verses. Criticism, however, he would barely tolerate, for he was exquisitely sensitive to fault-finding. The furthest his friends dared go towards disapproval was to be silent. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that no critic could be so merciless as he was himself.)His first volume, *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*, was published in 1830 by Effingham Wilson, who also published Robert Browning's *Paracelsus*. Originally he had intended to join forces with Hallam in the production of a joint volume; but Hallam's father had vetoed the project. *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*, was not received with much favour by the public; but, amid much that was weak and immature, it contained pieces which in no indistinct manner announced the advent of a true poet. Hallam thought the book far too good to be popular; its beauties were too delicate and subtle for rapid recognition. The volume contained fifty-three pieces, nearly half of which have been withdrawn, while the remainder, preserved for us among the *Juvenilia* in the collected editions of the poet's works, have been retouched again and again. Among the better known may be named such delicate prettinesses as *Lilian*, *The Ballad of Oriana*, *The Merman* and *The Mermaid*, that moss-crusted picture of dreariness; *Mariana;* and *Recollections of the Arabian Nights*, a poem which Mr R. H. Hutton considered expressive of the luxurious sense of a gorgeous inward picture gallery. The poems were favourably reviewed in the *Westminster*, probably by John Stuart Mill, and in this article the following passage occurs:

> If our estimate of Mr Tennyson be correct, he too is a poet, and many years hence may be read his juvenile description of that character with the proud consciousness that it has become the description and history of his own work.

'Have you seen the review of A. T.'s poems in the *Westminster?*' wrote Monteith to Milnes. 'It is really enthusiastic. If we can get him well reviewed in the *Edinburgh* it will do.'

Arthur Hallam contributed an enthusiastic review to *The Englishman's Magazine*, in which periodical appeared a sonnet of Tennyson's entitled *Check every Outbreak*. The poem which Mill and Hallam both singled out for special commendation was the *Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind not in Unity with Itself*, which was suppressed for some time, but which has ultimately found a place in the complete edition of the poems. To Arthur Hallam the mood portrayed was rather the clouded season of an intellectual giant than the habitual condition of a mind feeble and 'second-rate.' In *The Poet*, one of the best of the early poems, Tennyson sets before him the high ideal to attain to which was his aim through life. With heaven flowing in upon his soul in many dreams of high desire, he dedicated his gifts to Freedom, upon whose maiden robes was traced, in flame, WISDOM, 'a name to shake all evil dreams of power.'

Tennyson had grown physically as well as intellectually. One day, on the lawn at Somersby, he surprised his friends by taking up a little pony and carrying it. Brookfield remarked, 'It is not fair, Alfred, that you should be Hercules as well as Apollo.' FitzGerald notes that Alfred could hurl the caber farther than any of the neighbouring clowns.

In the summer of 1830 the poet and Hallam made a secret expedition to Spain in connection with the fatal attempt at an uprising under Torrijos, a valiant and gallant man, standing in the vanguard of Freedom's fight, who had headed the revolt against the Inquisition and the tyranny of Ferdinand, and who is described by Carlyle in his *Life of Sterling.* To him Alfred and Arthur were the bearers of money; they had a meeting with the heads of the conspiracy in the Pyrenees, and were not heard of by their friends for some weeks. Unfortunately no further details of this mission have been preserved, and it is a mere glimmer in the dark that we get of an expedition which was the outcome of the Reform ferment in England.

In February 1831 Tennyson was recalled from Cambridge by the illness of his father, who died in the following month. 'The dawn-golden times' at Trinity had passed; Tennyson did not return, and consequently never took his degree, his prize-poem being his only university honour. Dr Tennyson was buried in Somersby churchyard, and by a happy arrangement with the new incumbent, the family were allowed to occupy the Rectory, with all its hallowed associations, till 1837.

CHAPTER III.

MY FRIEND, THE BROTHER OF MY LOVE.

OF the love of Alfred Tennyson for Arthur Hallam all the world knows. It was one of those beautiful soul-friendships that have given us David's lament for Jonathan and John Milton's for Edward King.

Arthur Henry Hallam, who entered Trinity in the same year as Tennyson, was a London boy some eighteen months his junior, having been born in February 1811. His father was Henry Hallam, the famous historian. A child of remarkable gifts, he learned Latin with the greatest ease, and a visit with his parents to Switzerland and Italy, when he was seven years old, made him quite familiar with French and Italian. A brilliant career at Eton followed, where, however, his tastes led him to feed his mind on Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth rather than on the ancient classics; though Sappho, Lucretius, and Catullus had their place. The *Eton Miscellany* of the period contains several of his prize essays and a tale from his pen of the Lakes of Killarney. In the school debates of the association known as 'The Society,' which during its career of above fourscore years has supplied the British Empire with no less than four prime-ministers, he acquired that knack of hitting the mark afterwards so noticeable in the controversial meetings of 'The Apostles.' Then followed another visit to Italy, where he drank deep from Dante and Petrarch, and which exercised a masterful, abnormal power upon him. Writing to Mr Gladstone, to whom at Eton he had been knit as to a brother, he said of his Italian visit: 'I have been, I believe, somewhat changed since I last saw you. I have snatched rather eagerly a draught from the cup of life, with its strange mingling of sweet and bitter.' Little wonder was it, therefore, that when, in October 1828, he came into residence at Trinity, though Tennyson's junior in years, he was considerably his senior in learning and in experience.

But it was the heart and not the brain of the man that so indelibly impressed itself on his contemporaries. 'As near perfection as mortal man can be,' wrote Alfred Tennyson. 'He seemed,' his father said of him, 'to tread the earth as a spirit from some better world;' and Mr Gladstone has declared that even at Eton

'I marked him
As a far Alp; and loved to watch the sunrise
Dawn on his ample brow.' *

Of the first meeting of the two we have no record; but their acquaintance very quickly ripened into friendship, and oft did Tennyson and Hallam pace arm-in-arm 'that long walk of limes' at Cambridge, which John Milton and Edward King in their day had also trod. Tennyson's genius was the more poetic, Hallam's mind the more

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* De Vere's *Mary Tudor*.

speculative; and to his influence on Tennyson may be traced the metaphysical bent of much of the poet's work.

In the summer of 1830, as we have seen, the two friends went on their political expedition to Spain. Naturally enough it had an unsettling effect; and in October of the same year we find Hallam writing to Tennyson from Essex that he does not find that his adventures have produced quite a favourable impression on his father's mind. 'I don't mean,' he wrote, 'that he blames me at all; but his old notions about the university begin to revive, and he does not seem quite to comprehend that after helping to revolutionise kingdoms, one is still less inclined than before to trouble one's head about scholarships, degree, and such gear.'

By this time Arthur Hallam was a welcome guest at Somersby, and had become attached to the poet's sister Emily. In the following year, 1831, the affection ripened into love; but, by the wish of Hallam's father, their engagement was kept secret until Arthur came of age. So he returned to Cambridge, where he won a prize for declamation, his subject being 'The Conduct of the Independent Party during the Civil War.' Parts of his vacations, however, were spent at the Lincolnshire rectory, and in the eighty-ninth section of *In Memoriam* Tennyson has preserved for us a picture of those joyous days.

In the next year, 1832, Hallam took his degree, left Cambridge, and went to reside with his father at 67 Wimpole Street, London,—'the dark house in the long, unlovely street.' 'You will always find us at sixes and sevens,' he wrote to Tennyson, with the view of impressing on his friend's memory the number of his dwelling. His chosen profession was the law, and his name had been entered at the Inner Temple; but before settling down to his studies he spent the summer at Somersby, where he was now the acknowledged lover of Emily Tennyson. To Trench he writes thus: 'I am now at Somersby, not only as the friend of Alfred Tennyson, but as a lover of his sister. An attachment on my part of nearly two years' standing, and a mutual engagement of one year, are, I fervently hope, only the commencement of a union which circumstances may not impair, and the grave itself not conclude!' Of this visit, and of succeeding vacations similarly spent, the eighty-ninth canto of *In Memoriam* is full.

Of Tennyson's life during this time we get but external glimpses. *The Gem* for 1831 contained three poems by him, in one of which, *No More*, is to be found the germ of Violet's song in *The Princess.* Most unfortunately all his letters to Hallam were destroyed by the bereaved father after Arthur's death, an irreparable loss, for they would have told us much of his inner self. He and Hallam met at Sheffield and talked over literary plans. Jane Austen's novels were read and criticised, preference being given to *Emma.* Fanny Kemble was judged to be 'supreme in Juliet;' and Hallam vowed he would never forget her acting in *The Hunchback.* Tennyson's forthcoming volume was discussed, and politics and the wretched state of the poorer classes were not forgotten. 'Where the ideas of time and sorrow are not, and sway not the soul with power, there is no true knowledge in Poetry or Philosophy.' So wrote Hallam. There has been, perhaps, a somewhat general misconception of Tennyson as one indifferent to politics. To mere party-politics he was not only indifferent but averse; but all his life he was keenly interested in every great public question that affected the strength, well-being, and progress of the nation. At Cambridge he took a keen interest in politics, and was among the supporters of the Anti-Slavery Convention and the measure for abolishing subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles. That he was sympathetically alive to the revolutionary movements on the Continent we have seen; and in the *Memoir* his son has an amusing story of the rejoicing of the Tennysons over the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832: how the news of the passing reached Somersby in the dead of night, and how the brothers and sisters sallied forth into the darkness and began to ring the church bells madly, to the horror of the new parson, who, rushing into the church in the blackness, laid hold of the first thing he could get hold of. It happened to be Cecilia Tennyson's little dog, which immediately tried to bite.

Meanwhile Tennyson was made to feel for the first time the cold wind of criticism. In *Blackwood's Magazine* for February and May 1832 there appeared from the pen of Professor Wilson (Christopher North) notices of his first volume of poems. Against the abuse and misrepresentation which Christopher North on account of these articles has received from Tennyson's too ardent and indiscriminating admirers it is time to enter a strong protest. Athletic the critic certainly was, descending, after the manner of the time, to personality, boisterous in his strength, altogether too big-boned a man for rapier-work, and delighting rather to swing his heavy broadsword; but spitefully abusive, arrogant, and sadly wanting in judgment Christopher North was not. In saying so some of Tennyson's biographers only display their want of appreciation of the rough, picturesque humour, and wild, withering sarcasm which made the Professor such an immense power in literary circles, and which Tennyson himself acknowledged that he loved. The criticism was anything but wholly condemnatory; and Hallam, in writing to Tennyson about it, remarked: 'He means well, I take it; and as he has extracted nearly your whole book, and has in his soberer mood spoken in terms as high as I could have used myself of some of your best poems, I think the review will assist rather than hinder the march of your reputation.' The truth of Professor Wilson's criticism and the value of his judgment are shown in the fact that all the poems selected by him for praise have been retained, with more or less alteration, in the collected works, while most of those adversely criticised have disappeared. Tennyson no doubt suffered keenly from the Professor's banter; but, after all, the latter was right. He had been the pet of a coterie, and his natural sensitiveness, fostered by his secluded upbringing, had grown almost into a disease. A cool breeze of criticism was wholesome, and it is to the young poet's credit that, instead of breaking his heart over it, he applied himself the more diligently to the perfecting of his work—not, however, before he had addressed to Wilson the following good-humoured retort:

> You did late review my lays,
>   Crusty Christopher;
> You did mingle blame and praise,
>   Rusty Christopher.
>
> When I learnt from whom it came
> I forgave you all the blame,
>   Musty Christopher;
> I could *not* forgive the praise,
>   Fusty Christopher.

Some six months after, in the winter of 1832, appeared Tennyson's second volume, published by Mr Edward Moxon, and dated 1833. It was entitled simply *Poems by Alfred Tennyson* ('Don't let the printer squire me,' he had written to Moxon), and it contained only thirty-one pieces. Of these about fifteen have since been suppressed, and the remainder, largely rewritten, are now included in his collected works under the title, *The Lady of Shalott and other Poems.* In power and in variety of style they far surpassed those of his earlier volume, and included such universal favourites as *A Dream of Fair Women*, *The Palace of Art*, *Œnone*, *The Miller's Daughter*, *The May Queen*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, and *The Lady of Shalott*, the latter the first fruits of the poet's study of the Arthurian legends. Most of them had previously been submitted to his little knot of Cambridge admirers.

One reception which these poems met was a really savage attack in the July number of *The Quarterly Review*, known in those days as 'the hang, draw, and *Quarterly*.' The editor, John Gibson Lockhart, biographer of Sir Walter Scott, who was often called 'The Scorpion,' because the sting of his writings was usually in the latter end, was believed to have written it. The article introduced 'to the admiration of our more sequestered readers a new prodigy of genius—another and a brighter star of that galaxy, or *milky way*, of poetry, of which the lamented Keats was the harbinger.' Fifteen pages of ridicule followed. 'We take upon ourselves to reassure Mr Tennyson that even after he shall be dead and buried, as much *sense* will still remain as he has now the good fortune to possess.' Tennyson winced under the insults of the review, and in a letter to Christopher North he wrote that some one had laid the authorship on the Professor, but that he declined to believe it, for he could not recognise in the article one spark of genius or a single touch of true humour or good feeling. 'Moreover,' he added, 'the man misprints me, which is worse than lying.'

Hallam and his friends sought to pour balm on

Tennyson's wounded spirit by telling him that the *Quarterly* was the mouthpiece of a party in politics and literature, and that the review would bring him into notice; but he was hard to comfort, for the *Quarterly* was a powerful organ, and, indeed, an old Lincolnshire squire stoutly maintained that it was the next book to the Bible. Fortunately, however, there were critics other minded than J. G. Lockhart; and during the next year or two Tennyson received great encouragement from men like S. T. Coleridge, John Sterling, Allan Cunningham, and John Stuart Mill.

But a great shadow was now about to close in upon the poet's life, enveloping it in vapourish folds of death. Arthur Hallam had never been strong, and during the spring of 1833 influenza laid him low. His recovery was so slow that in the autumn he went with his father for a tour on the Continent. When at Vienna, in the month of September, he was seized with an intermittent fever, the result of a chill, from which, however, nothing serious was apprehended. His father went out for a walk in the streets of Vienna, and coming back, found his son lying, as he supposed asleep, on the sofa. He sat down to write letters, and imperceptibly the strange silence told its tale. It was the sleep of death. A sudden determination of blood to the head had overcharged the brain cells, and Hallam's gentle spirit had departed without pain.

In Vienna's fatal walls
God's finger touched him, and he slept.

'Those whose eyes must long be dim with tears,' wrote the broken-hearted father, 'brought him home to rest among his kindred and in his own country.' He died on the 15th of September 1833, and on 3d January 1834 they laid him to rest in Clevedon church, a lovely spot overlooking the Bristol Channel, where 'the stately ship sails on to its haven under the hill.'

Hallam dying when he was twenty-three was deemed worthy of *In Memoriam*, the meditations of seventeen years; and scarcely less a tribute to his worth are the utterances of his other friends. 'There was no one,' said Mr Gladstone, 'who did not feel at once bound closely to him by commanding affection, and left far behind by the rapid growth and rich development of his ever-searching mind;' and Richard Monckton Milnes: 'He is the only man here of my own standing before whom I bow in conscious inferiority in everything;' while Dean Alford has sung of him:

Gentle soul
That ever moved among us in a veil
Of heavenly lustre.

Of all that Arthur Hallam was to Tennyson and his circle we may not know. Love and friendship may do much to tell it, as witness the noble verses of the greatest poet of the Victorian age, and, after seventy years, the serene and measured tribute of the most famous of its statesmen;* but strive as love and friendship will, they can never but inadequately convey to others the mystic spell effected by a pure soul passionately beloved—a soul that in its swift passage brings with it untold joy and stimulus, and leaves behind it a lifelong yearning. Such spirits are rare indeed, and the world is apt to deem the lavish laments and elegies as but the extravagances of unmanly grief; yet we must take it that, in the early passing of Arthur Hallam, a great light was extinguished—one which was eminently needed by his country and his age. Looking back at the close of a long life, rich in contact with great and noble minds, Mr Gladstone, with calm judgment, deliberately states that, so far as his estimation is concerned, Hallam stands, as in the old Eton days—supreme. 'It is the simple truth that Arthur Henry Hallam was a spirit so exceptional that everything with which he was brought into relation during his shortened passage through this world came to be, through this contact, glorified by a touch of the ideal. . . . His temper was as sweet as his manners were winning. His conduct was without a spot, or even a speck. He was that rare and blessed creature, *anima naturaliter Christiana*. . . . He resembles a passing emanation from some other and less darkly-chequered world.' And as if that were not enough, the great statesman pays this tribute to his intellectual powers: 'It has been an age which had for its prevailing note the abandonment and removal of restraints, and very largely of restraints which were injurious. The motto of the race has been, "Unhand me!" But great and sudden augmentation of liberty, in a thousand forms, places under an aggravated strain that balance which governs humanity, both in thought and conduct; and upon my heightened retrospect I must advisedly declare that I have never, in the actual experience of life, known a man who seemed to me to possess all the numerous and varied qualifications required in order to meet this growing demand, even in its fullest breadth, in anything like the measure in which Arthur Hallam exhibited these qualifications.'

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* *Personal Recollections of Arthur H. Hallam*, by Mr Gladstone, 1898.

CHAPTER IV.

MELODY DEADENED.

'A CATASTROPHE' was the phrase used by one of the Cambridge group in writing of Arthur Hallam's death; and no other word can so well indicate the nature of the blow that fell on Alfred Tennyson. He was benumbed, and all his faculties seemed overshadowed by a dark cloud. When he recovered from his blank despondency, it was to drug memory with work. 'Perpetual idleness,' he said, 'must be one of the punishments of hell.' And again, 'We must bear or we must die. It is easier, perhaps, to die; but infinitely less noble.'

Of his sister Emily's suffering we catch but a sob. 'You know, Alfred,' she wrote to him in July 1834, 'the great desire I have to become acquainted with the Hallam family, particularly with Ellen; she will perhaps be the friend to remove in some degree the horrible feeling of desolation which is ever at my heart.'

To Arthur Hallam's death has generally been attributed Tennyson's almost unbroken silence of nearly ten years, from 1832, when the *Poems* appeared, to 1842, when his next two volumes were published. Such a supposition, however, is hardly correct; for during the greater part of that period, from 1834 indeed, he was hard at work; and hundreds of lines were, to use his own words, 'blown up the chimney with his pipe-smoke, or were written down and thrown into the fire as not being then perfect enough.' The *Quarterly* article had bitten him deeper than even his friends imagined; and, notwithstanding the partial success of the volume of 1832, he fancied that England was unsympathetic towards his work, and half resolved to live abroad. Stifling that desire, however, he braced himself instead to the task of making his poems as perfect as possible, stoutly resolving not to publish again until he had of his best to give.

So it is that we hear but little of Tennyson during these long years of preparation. He buried himself very much in himself. 'I suppose nobody writes to you,' wrote Richard Monckton Milnes, 'because you never write to nobody.' And Tennyson replied, 'It is so long since I have looked upon and conversed with you that I will not deny but that you had withdrawn a little into the twilight. Yet you do me a wrong in supposing that I have forgotten you. I shall not easily forget you, for you have that about you which one remembers with pleasure.'

At this time Tennyson's predecessor in the laureateship, Wordsworth, did not at first much appreciate his work; and we learn from a letter of James Spedding's that 'he is very modest in his refusal to praise, attributing his want of admiration to a deficiency in himself, which cannot accommodate itself to a new style of beauty, or that the compass of his sympathies has been narrowed by flowing too long and too strongly in one direction.' Some years after, however, Aubrey de Vere recited to Wordsworth two poems by Tennyson, *You ask why though ill at ease* and *Of old sat Freedom on the heights.* Wordsworth listened with a gradually deepening attention. After a pause he answered, 'I must acknowledge that these two poems are very solid and noble in thought. Their diction also seems singularly stately.' Some one else records how in later years Wordsworth said to the younger poet, whom he had then learnt to love, 'Mr Tennyson, I have been endeavouring all my life to write a pastoral like your *Dora*, and have not succeeded.' This is some set-off to Matthew Arnold's well-known contrast of *Dora* with Wordsworth's *Michael* as instances of artificial and real simplicity—*simplesse* and *simplicité*, as the French call them.

In 1835 we find the first mention of *In Memoriam* in a letter from J. M. Heath. '*The Xmas*,' he writes, 'is indeed most beautiful, most touching; and the latter portions of the *Fair Ship* speak to *our* hearts indeed.' The verses alluded to are sections ix. and xxviii. to xxx. of the poem. In this year, also, his brother Charles took orders, and was appointed to the curacy of Tealby. Their great-uncle, Sam Turner of Caistor, died, and under his will Charles succeeded to the property and assumed the name of Turner. In the following year he married Louisa Sellwood, youngest daughter of Mr Sellwood, a lawyer of Horncastle, and settled with his wife at the vicarage of Grasby, near Caistor. 'He has become an independent gentleman,' wrote Alfred, 'living in a big house among chalky wolds.' Frederick, who had been left a small property at Grimsby, had gone abroad, first to Corfu, and then to Florence, where he lived in a villa planned by Michael Angelo on the Fiesole road. He had a passion for music; and there, 'in a large hall'—so the story goes—

'Frederick Tennyson used to sit in the midst of his forty fiddlers.' Thus Alfred was now the head of the house, and, when the family left Somersby in 1837, on him devolved the task of finding a new home. His choice fell on High Beech in Epping Forest, where they resided till 1840.

To his little circle of friends must be added at this time Edward FitzGerald, who in 1835 stayed with him in Cumberland at the Speddings'. Like all who knew him, FitzGerald was struck with Tennyson's promise of greatness; and while he laughed at the drollness of his little humours and grumpinesses, he felt further a sense of depression at times from the overshadowing of a so much more lofty intellect than his own.

In 1836 occurred a delightful little passage of arms between Milnes and Tennyson, which fortunately has been preserved to us. Milnes had been commissioned to obtain contributions for a charity book of poetry got up for the destitute family of a man of letters, and edited by Lord Northampton, which was to take the form of an annual called *The Tribute.* Milnes wrote to Tennyson confessing that he had half-promised to Lord Northampton something pretty considerable from Tennyson, and teasingly asked him to comply. 'Now, be a good boy,' he said, 'and do as you 're told.' But Tennyson would *not* be a good boy. 'Three years back,' he answered, 'provoked by the incivility of editors, I swore an oath that I would never again have to do with their vapid books, and I broke it in the face of Heaven when I wrote for Lady What 's-her-name Wortley. But then her sister wrote to Brookfield and said she was beautiful, so I could not help it. But whether the Marquis be beautiful or not, I don't much mind; if he be, let him give God thanks and make no boast. To write for people with prefixes to their names is to milk he-goats; there is neither honour nor profit.'

This was writing worthy of 'crusty Christopher' himself, and Milnes, more stung by it than Tennyson had been by the critique in *Blackwood*, termed it 'insolent irony.' To which Tennyson, in a mood of merriest banter, replied with a promise to help, and got his brothers to join him. The verses which he sent were those containing the germs of his *Maud*, 'a poem,' as Mr Swinburne has said, 'of deepest charm and fullest delight of pathos and melody.'

FitzGerald gives us the following glimpse of Tennyson in the spring of 1838:

> We have had Alfred Tennyson here, very droll and very wayward; and much sitting up of nights till two and three in the morning with pipes in our mouths; at which hour we would get Alfred to give us some of his infinite music, which he does between growling and smoking.

While at Epping Forest, Tennyson often went to London; but he did not stay in town over-night, his mother being in such a nervous state that he was not able to leave her. Tunbridge Wells, whither they removed in 1840 by the advice of the doctor, who said 'it was the only place in England for the Tennyson constitution,' was an abomination to Alfred, and he declared they were half-killed by the tenuity of the atmosphere and the presence of steel more or less in earth, air, and water. The following year the family migrated to Bonley, not far from Maidstone. Edmund Lushington, Grecian and Egyptologist, had by this time married Cecilia Tennyson, and Park House, his residence, was hard by. Tennyson now made frequent visits to town, staying at Norfolk Street, Strand, the Temple, or Lincoln's Inn Fields, and dining with his friends at the 'Cock' in Fleet Street, where he and his well-blacked meerschaum are remembered to this day; though the site of the old tavern is now occupied by a bank—the new one is at the Fleet Street end of Chancery Lane. FitzGerald recalls, however, that Tennyson's chief dinner-resort in the ante-laureate days was Bertolini's, at the 'Newton's Head,' close to Leicester Square—*Dirtolini's* they sometimes called it. And this is borne out by the plump head-waiter of the 'Cock,' who objected to the picture in *Will Waterproof's Monologue*, on the ground that Tennyson did not come often enough to the tavern to take such liberties. In a letter from James Spedding to Richard Monckton Milnes, dated 4th April 1837, the following delightful passage occurs:

> Yesterday I dined with Alfred Tennyson at the Cock Tavern, Temple Bar. We had two chops, one pickle, two cheeses, one pint of stout, one pint of port, and three cigars. When we had finished, I had to take his regrets to the Kembles; he could not go because he had the influenza.

Tennyson's friends were few in number, for he avoided general society, and would prefer to sit up all night with one comrade, or else to sit and think alone. Nevertheless we find him a member of 'The Anonymous Club' (afterwards renamed 'The Sterling'), which used to dine once a month and discuss philosophical and literary subjects—a distinguished coterie that included Carlyle, Cunningham, Macready, John Stuart Mill, Forster, Sterling, Thackeray, and Walter Savage Landor.

Meanwhile a wealth of poetic material had been steadily accumulating, and his friends were always urging him to publish; but hitherto Tennyson had proved obdurate. 'Tennyson composes every day,' wrote Milnes to Aubrey de Vere, 'but nothing will persuade him to print, or even write it down.' He had shrunk from coming before the public in any form. *The Lover's Tale*, written in the Cambridge days, and printed privately in 1833, had been suppressed, and his other two pieces had been the verses in *The Tribute* and a short poem, *St Agnes*, which was printed in *The Keepsake*. It was a calm, religious poem, betraying Keble's influence, and Tennyson's friends had been somewhat disappointed with it. 'An iced saint,' said one of them, 'is certainly better than an iced cream, but not much better than a frosted tree.' In 1835, hearing of an intention of Mill to review him favourably in the *London Review*, he had written: 'I do not wish to be dragged forward again in any shape before the reading public at present.' But now he was once more braced for the struggle of life; during those weary years the far future had been his world always, and now—

Hope, a poising eagle, burnt
Above the unrisen morrow.

'I intend to get it out shortly,' he wrote of his forthcoming volume to Edmund Lushington early in 1842, 'but I cannot say I have been what you professors call "working" at it; that, indeed, is not my way. I take my pipe, and the Muse descends in the fume, not like your modern ladies who shriek at a pipe as if they saw a splacknuck: do you know what a splacknuck is?' 'Just heard from Edgeworth,' writes FitzGerald, 'that Alfred is in London preparing for the press!!!'

The poems selected for publication were nearly all contained in a foolscap folio parchment-bound blank book which FitzGerald used to call 'The Butcher's Book.' They were written towards one side of the large page, and the unoccupied edges and corners were often stripped down for pipe-lights, care being taken, as Tennyson once seriously observed, to save the MS. One by one the pages were torn out for the printer, and when returned with the proofs, were put in the fire, with the exception of two or three which FitzGerald preserved and afterwards presented to the library of Trinity College. It was an anxious time; but early in 1842 the *Poems* were out in two volumes, the first consisting chiefly of verses already published in the earlier collections, and now revised, and the second, with two exceptions, composed entirely of new poems. These volumes showed how Hallam's death and the subsequent long silence had deepened Tennyson's comprehension of life. Among the new pieces were *The Gardener's Daughter*, a poem of love set in a framework of soft and flower-haunted English scenery; *The Talking Oak*, than which there is no poem of Tennyson's more English; *Dora*, an idyl stately in its serious simplicity, and partly suggested by *Dora Cresswell*, one of Miss Mitford's rural sketches in *Our Village; Audley Court* and *The Golden Year; Walking to the Mail* and *Edwin Morris;* three poems that may be called theological, *St Simeon Stylites* (the study of an ascetic), *The Two Voices* (the ideas in which were those of Coleridge, Erskine, Maurice, and the Broad Church school), and *The Vision of Sin* (an allegory whose main contention is that, in order to recapture pleasure, every lust of sense is driven to increase the stimulant till all pleasure dies). *The Two Voices* was expressive of the religious doubts and speculations of that period in England; and in it Christian theology was recast in harmony with the new criticism and the recent discoveries of science. Of classical and romantic poems there were *Ulysses*, founded on a passage in Dante, the study of a soul that cannot rest, the perfect antithesis of the temperament of the Lotos-eaters; *Tithonus*, descriptive of the horror of immortality with memory and without youth; *Sir Galahad*, a conception of the total conquest of the evil of matter; and the *Morte d'Arthur*, with its thoroughly Tennysonian picture of modern social life in the prologue—a poem 'fit prelude to the lordly music of the *Idylls*.'

Other well-known pieces were *Love and Duty; Godiva; Lady Clare*, suggested by Miss Ferrier's novel *Inheritance; The Lord of Burleigh; Edward Gray; Will Waterproof;* the conclusion of *The May Queen; The Skipping-rope*, afterwards withdrawn, a poem about which FitzGerald remarked: 'Alfred, whatever he may think, cannot trifle: . . . his smile is rather a grim one;' *Break, Break, Break*, made, his son tells us, in a Lincolnshire lane between blossoming hedges at five in the morning; and lastly (not to name every poem in the volume), *Locksley Hall*, which sprang into immediate favour, and ever since has held sway over the minds of young England. Notwithstanding stories long current, *Locksley Hall* was not based on personal experience or on any Cambridge student-gossip. *The Miller's Daughter* is a simple love-story of a squire's son wedded to sweet Alice, and a peaceful, happy married life resulting. It became a favourite with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Few poems are oftener committed to memory than *The May Queen* and *A Dream of Fair Women.*

From this time Tennyson's place was secure, and one of the first authorities to lead the chorus of praise was the 'hang, draw, and *Quarterly*.' The article was written by Sterling, who was ill, and who had been asked by

Lockhart to review 'any book he pleased.' Sterling naturally reviewed Tennyson, and favourably; and Lockhart, with generous if somewhat tardy justice, allowed it to appear.

Milnes in the *Westminster* and Spedding in the *Edinburgh* followed; while across the Atlantic, in far-off America, Tennyson had an appreciative circle of admirers in Margaret Fuller, Emerson, Lowell, and Edgar Allan Poe. 'I am not sure,' wrote the author of *The Raven* in the *Democratic Review*, 'that Tennyson is not the greatest of poets.' Dickens read his poems by the seashore at Broadstairs, and wrote: 'What a great creature he is!' 'Beautiful! beautiful!' wrote Mrs Browning (then Miss Elizabeth B. Barrett) to a correspondent about 'this divine Tennyson'—'Beautiful! beautiful! After all, it is a noble thing to be a poet. . . . He is one of God's singers, whether he knows it or does not know it.'

In the following year 'The Decade,' an Oxford debating society, discussed whether Tennyson or Wordsworth was the greatest English poet of the age; and it is interesting to record that in the same year the two met at the house of Mr Moxon, Tennyson's publisher. Tennyson's shyness well-nigh proved too much for him; but in the end, it is said, he moved up to Wordsworth and spoke to him in a low voice and with a perceptible emotion. What he said has not been preserved, but Wordsworth looked very much pleased; and writing of the incident to his American friend, Professor Reed, he said, Tennyson 'is decidedly the first of our living poets, and, I hope, will live to give the world still better things.' The poet, Samuel Rogers, then over eighty, asked Tennyson often to his house to dine, where they talked about death till the tears rolled down the younger man's eyes. Here he met Tom Moore, Leigh Hunt, Landor, Gladstone, and others.

It was about this time that Tennyson and Carlyle became intimate; and in a letter to Emerson the Sage of Chelsea gave his well-known description of his 'soul's brother,' as he called him:

> Alfred is one of the few British and foreign figures (a not increasing number, I think) who are and remain beautiful to me, a true human soul, or some authentic approximation thereto, to whom your own soul can say 'Brother!' However, I doubt he will not come [to see me]; he often skips me in these brief visits to town; skips everybody, indeed, being a man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom, carrying a bit of chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into cosmos. . . . He had his breeding at Cambridge, as if for the law or church; being master of a small annuity, on his father's decease he preferred clubbing with his mother and some sisters, to live unpromoted and write poems. In this way he lives still, now here, now there; the family always within reach of London, never in it; he himself making rare and brief visits, lodging in some old comrade's rooms. I think he must be under forty, not much under it. One of the finest-looking men in the world. A great shock of rough, dusty-dark hair; bright, laughing, hazel eyes; massive, aquiline face, most massive, yet most delicate; of sallow-brown complexion, almost Indian-looking; clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy; smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical, metallic—fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may be between; speech and speculation free and plenteous. I do not meet, in these late decades, such company over a pipe! We shall see what he will grow to. He is often unwell; very chaotic—his way is through Chaos and the Bottomless and Pathless, not handy for making out many miles upon.

Emerson wrote back: 'Oh, cherish him with love and praise, and draw from him whole books full of new verses yet.'

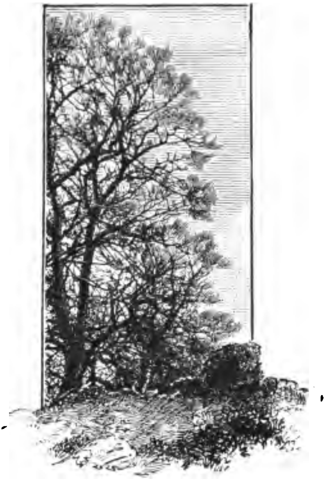
On the publication of the 1842 volumes Carlyle wrote to Tennyson: 'Truly it is long since in any English book, poetry or prose, I have felt the pulse of a real man's heart as I do in this same.'

One of the penalties of fame was that Tennyson now began to receive poems for criticism. 'If you knew,' he wrote, 'what a nuisance these volumes of verse are! Rascals send me theirs per post from America, and I have more than once been knocked up out of bed to pay three or four shillings for books of which I can't get thro' one page, for of all books the most insipid reading is second-rate verse. Blue books, red books, almanacs, peerages, anything is better.' Another penalty was a godchild, which entailed the purchase of a silver cup.

In Caroline Fox's *Memories of Old Friends* we have the following vivid pen-portrait of the poet at this period:

> Tennyson is a grand specimen of a man, with a magnificent head set on his shoulders like the capital of a mighty pillar. His hair is long and wavy, and covers a massive head. He wears a beard and moustache, which one begrudges, as hiding so much of that firm, forceful, but finely-chiselled mouth. His eyes are large, gray, and open wide when a subject interests him; they are well shaded by the noble brow, with its strong lines of thought and suffering. I can quite understand Sam Laurence calling it the best balance of head he had ever seen.

Howitt, writing of the same period, tells us the poet might have been seen in a country inn, 'with a foot on each hob of the fireplace, a volume of Greek in one hand, his meerschaum in the other, so far advanced towards the seventh heaven that he would not thank you to call him back into this nether world.' And Mr Conway describes a pedestrian excursion which Tennyson made to Devonshire, in which he stopped at the wayside inns, and was now and then the life of the common tap-room, talking with the farmers about their crops, and sometimes getting into warm discussion on religious topics, in which he valiantly defended the liberal side.



CHAPTER V.

MELODY WAKENED.

'FIVE hundred of my books are sold: according to Moxon's brother, I have made a sensation! I wish the woodworks would make a sensation! I expect they will.' So wrote Tennyson to his brother-in-law in September 1842. The 'woodworks' referred to an idea of wood-carving by machinery which had been conceived or adopted by Dr Allen, a physician near Beachhill, and in which he persuaded Tennyson to invest all his capital. The bubble burst in 1844, leaving Tennyson penniless and his brothers and sisters impoverished. Hypochondria followed, and at one time his life was despaired of. 'I have,' he wrote, 'drunk one of those most bitter draughts out of the cup of life, which go near to make men hate the world they move in.' To his friends he was as inaccessible as ever. 'I have written two notes to Alfred,' writes FitzGerald, 'to ask him just to notify his existence to me; but you know he is obstinate on that point.'

Pecuniary relief came with Dr Allen's death in January

1845, for Tennyson's brother-in-law had generously insured the Doctor's life for part of the debt due to the poet, and in September of the same year Sir Robert Peel advised the Queen to bestow on Tennyson a pension of £200, a mark of royal favour for one who had devoted to worthy purposes great intellectual powers. In connection with this, Mr (now Sir T.) Wemyss Reid, in his *Life of Lord Houghton*, relates the following incident:

> 'Richard Milnes,' said Carlyle one day, withdrawing his pipe from his mouth, as they were seated together in the little house in Cheyne Row, 'when are you going to get that pension for Alfred Tennyson?'
>
> 'My dear Carlyle,' responded Milnes, 'the thing is not so easy as you seem to suppose. What will my constituents say if I do get the pension for Tennyson? They know nothing about him or his poetry, and they will probably think he is some poor relation of my own, and that the whole affair is a job.'
>
> Solemn and emphatic was Carlyle's response. 'Richard Milnes, on the Day of Judgment, when the Lord asks you why you didn't get that pension for Alfred Tennyson, it will not do to lay the blame on your constituents; it is *you* that will be damned.'

In later years, when his poems brought him fame and fortune, this source of income was added to the sums which Tennyson bounteously dispensed on less-favoured literary and other deserving persons.

The choice of Sir Robert Peel, who had the bestowal of the pension, had wavered between Tennyson and Sheridan Knowles, the playwright; and it was a perusal of the poem *Ulysses*, brought under his notice by Mr Hallam and Richard Monckton Milnes, that decided the great statesman in favour of the former. As a matter of course there were disappointments and jealousies, and the friends of the unsuccessful candidate made themselves heard in the press.

Among them was Bulwer Lytton, the novelist, who, in *The New Timon: a Romance of London*, had the following shrewish lines:

> Let school-miss Alfred vent her chaste delight
> On 'darling little rooms so warm and bright;'
> Chaunt 'I 'm aweary' in infectious strain,
> And catch her 'blue fly singing i' the pane;'
> Though praised by critics and adored by Blues,
> Though Peel with pudding plump the puling muse,
> Though Theban taste the Saxon purse controls,
> And pensions Tennyson while starves a Knowles.
> Rather be thou, my poor Pierian maid,
> Decent at last, in Hayley's weeds arrayed,
> Than patch with frippery every tinsel line,
> And flaunt admired, the Rag Fair of the Nine.

An explanatory footnote stated that Tennyson was 'quartered on the public purse in the prime of life, without either wife or family.'

This was bad enough; but when Tennyson at his club one day found a paper containing a reference to the attack so folded and placed that it could not escape his eye, and when he further happened to see a letter from Lytton to a common friend in which the novelist spoke of Tennyson as a member of a rich family, a reference to the D'Eyncourt branch with whom Lytton was intimate, his patience gave out, and he hit out with a sureness of aim unequalled by any satirist of the day in some verses that Thackeray and the *Punch* staff, with whom Lytton was not popular, were only too delighted to publish. Though written by Tennyson, they were sent, not by the poet, but by John Forster, and appeared on February 18, 1846, above the signature of Alcibiades; and as they have never been included in Tennyson's collected works, it may not be out of place to quote a stanza or two:

We know him out of Shakespeare's art,
  And those fine curses which he spoke,
The *old* Timon, with his noble heart,
  That, strongly loathing, greatly broke.

So died the Old ; here comes the New ;
  Regard him : a familiar face ;
I *thought* we knew him. What ! it 's you,
  The padded man that wears the stays—

Who killed the girls and thrilled the boys
  With dandy pathos when you wrote ;
O Lion ! you, that made a noise,
  And shook a mane *en papillotes*.

. . . . .

What profits now to understand
  The merits of a spotless shirt—
A dapper boot—a little hand—
  If half the little soul is dirt ?

You talk of tinsel ! Why, we see
  Old marks of rouge upon your cheeks.
You prate of Nature ! You are he
  That spilt his life upon the cliques.

A Timon you ! Nay, nay, for shame ;
  It looks too arrogant a jest—
The fierce old man, to take *his* name—
  You band-box. Off, and let him rest.

Interesting as this is as an episode of Tennyson's literary life, it is worth recording if only to mark how the quarrel was afterwards healed. If our poet let the sun down on his wrath, he certainly did not let a week pass, for in the very next number of *Punch*, over the same signature, appeared, under the title of *After-thought*, the lines that in his collected works are now named *Literary Squabbles*.

The touch of remorse in it raises the writer to a loftier mood, and makes him feel that—

Surely, after all,
The noblest answer unto such
Is perfect silence when they brawl.

Lord Lytton on his part suppressed his share of the squabble in subsequent editions of his satire. Some years later he referred in public to a line of Tennyson's as the thought 'so exquisitely expressed by our Poet-Laureate;' and in 1877 Tennyson dedicated his drama of *Harold* to the Earl of Lytton, Bulwer's son. In such rare and graceful ways as these did the quondam foes forget and forgive; and the lesson learned was not forgotten at least by one, for at the close of a long life Tennyson was able to say, 'I never wrote a line against any one but Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer.' Sir Robert Peel, in bestowing the pension on Tennyson, had taken the view that it was for the benefit of English literature, and not a mere charity to be given to a man infirm and poor; but it is satisfactory to know that before very long he was enabled to confer a pension of the same amount on Sheridan Knowles.

Mrs Carlyle, who saw Tennyson at the theatre on 23d September 1845, writes that, in the interval between the play and the farce, she took a notion to make her way to Mrs Macready. 'Passing through a long, dim passage,' she says, 'I came on a tall man leant to the wall, with his head touching the ceiling like a *caryatid*, to all appearance asleep, or resolutely trying it under most unfavourable circumstances. "Alfred Tennyson!" I exclaimed, in joyful surprise. "Well?" said he, taking the hand I held out to him, and forgetting to let it go again.

"I did not know you were in town," said I. "I should like to know who you are," said he; "I know that I know you, but I cannot tell your name." And I had actually to name myself to him. Then he woke up in good earnest, and said he had been meaning to come to Chelsea.' Though Mrs Carlyle humbly intimated that her husband was in Scotland, Tennyson made his promised visit. Mrs Carlyle was 'headachy,' and had one or two callers. 'By a superhuman effort of volition he had put himself into a cab—nay, brought himself away from a dinner party, and was there to smoke and talk with me.'

In 1846 Tennyson went on a tour to the Isle of Wight, and thereafter proceeded to Switzerland with Edward Moxon. During this visit to the Alps he wrote the well-known passage in *The Princess* commencing—

> Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height.

At this time he was very troubled with his eyes. 'Those "animals"' (*Muscæ volitantes*), he wrote to his aunt, Mrs Russell, 'are very troublesome, and mine increase weekly; in fact, I almost look forward with certainty to being blind some of these days.'

In this year the fourth edition of the *Poems* was published, in which *The Golden Year* first saw the light; and in 1847 appeared Tennyson's first long poem, *The Princess*, 'that herald melody of the higher education of women,' 'gay and fanciful as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in plot, yet with the seriousness of life in its underlying chivalrous moral.' No one of Tennyson's poems has been subjected to so much correction as *The Princess*. In the second edition, issued in 1848, and dedicated to Henry Lushington, the alterations were verbal; but in the third edition, published in 1850, the songs were added with the view of expressing more clearly the meaning of the medley, and the prologue and conclusion were entirely remodelled. All the references to the prince's 'weird seizures' were woven into the story in the fourth edition (1851), and two of the songs were altered; while the reprint of 1853 received a further addition of fifteen lines, forming the fourth paragraph of the prologue. Such fastidiousness was not appreciated by the poet's publisher, Mr Moxon, who looked upon him as 'a great torment, keeping proofs a fortnight to alter, and then sending for revises.'

The poem may have had its origin in a joke of Cambridge days, when some merry undergraduates arrayed the pretty daughter of one of the professors in the proctor's bands, and passed her off for the proctor himself. Then there was talk at the time of a Woman's College; and a passage in Dr Johnson's *Rasselas* has been pointed out as probably one source of inspiration: 'The princess thought that of all sublunary things knowledge was the best. She desired first to learn all sciences, and then proposed to found a college of learned women, in which she would preside.' Finally, in many of the lines we catch more than an echo of the teaching of F. D. Maurice.

Many critics have written disparagingly of *The Princess* as the most trivial and ephemeral of the longer poems of Tennyson. Already, they say, the theme is out of date, and the pity remains that Tennyson should have wasted on it one or two really fine similes. Among his contemporaries, Carlyle and FitzGerald, it is said, gave up all hope of him on reading *The Princess*. Mrs Browning also was dissatisfied. 'Do tell me,' she asked Miss Mitford, 'your full thought of the commonwealth of women. I begin by agreeing with you as to his [Tennyson's] implied underestimate of women.' 'What woman will tell the great poet that Mary Wollstonecraft herself never dreamt of setting up collegiate states, proctordoms, and the rest, which is a worn-out plaything in the hands of one sex already, and need not be *transferred* in order to be proved ridiculous.' Yet it is perhaps not saying too much to call it the most original of all our poet's pieces, as it is certainly the most delightful. Tennyson considered *The Princess* to be one of the noblest among his women; and he once expressed his opinion that 'some of the blank verse in this poem is among the best I ever wrote.' The scene of the introduction was the park at Park House, Edmund Lushington's residence. The form the medley took, a tale from mouth to mouth, had been a game more than once played at Trinity, Cambridge; and interwoven with the quaint mediæval texture of the poem are memories of modern college life.

Mr Stopford Brooke's estimate of the poem is worth quoting: 'Holiday-hearted, amazingly varied, charming our leisured ease from page to page, it is a poem to read on a sunny day in one of those rare places in the world where "there is no clock in the forest," where the weight and worry of the past, the present, or the future do not make us conscious of their care.' Not a Midsummer Night's, but a Midsummer Afternoon's Dream.

The success of *The Princess* was considerable; but even yet Tennyson felt that he had not completely won his public. In a letter of Mrs Browning's to Miss Mitford we find the following interesting passage:

> What you tell me of Tennyson interests me, as everything about him must. I like to think of him digging gardens—room for cabbage and all. At the same time, what he says about the public '*hating* poetry' is certainly not a word for

Tennyson. Perhaps no true poet, having claims upon attention *solely* through his poetry, has attained so certain a success with such short delay. Instead of being pelted (as nearly every true poet has been), he stands already on a pedestal, and is recognised as a master-spirit, not by a coterie, but by the great public. Three large editions of *The Princess* have already been sold. If he isn't satisfied after all, I think he is wrong. Divine poet as he is, and no laurel being too leafy for him, yet he must be an unreasonable man, and not understanding of the growth of the laurel-trees and the nature of a reading public.

A letter of Carlyle's to Emerson, written in December 1847, about the date of the publication of *The Princess*, is worth quoting:

> Tennyson has been here for three weeks; dining daily till he is near dead;—setting out a poem withal. He came in to us on Sunday evening last, and on the preceding Sunday; a truly interesting Son of Earth, and Son of Heaven — who has almost lost his way, among the will-o'-wisps, I doubt; and may flounder ever deeper, over neck and nose at last, among the quagmires that abound! I like him well, but can do next to nothing for him. Milnes, with general co-operation, got him a Pension: but that is a poor outfit for such a soul. He wants a *task*; and, alas! that of spinning rhymes, and naming it 'Art' and 'high Art,' in a Time like ours, will never furnish him.

From 1846 to 1850 the Tennyson household was to be found at Bellevue House, St James's Square, Cheltenham; and there the poet chiefly resided, although he kept to his own circle and did not make many new acquaintances. Sydney Dobell was one, and Frederick Robertson, afterwards of Brighton, another. Of the latter Tennyson used to say: 'The first time I met Robertson I felt that he expected something notable from me, because I knew that he admired my poems, that he wished to pluck the heart from my mystery; so for the life of me, from pure nervousness, I could talk of nothing but beer.' His chief companion was Alan Ker, afterwards a judge in Jamaica, who married his sister Mary, and many a long walk together the two had. From Dr Ker, Alan's brother, we get a glimpse of Tennyson's loving raillery of his mother. He was wont to tease her about Dr Cumming and his 'bottles,' the bottles being the seven vials of St John's *Revelation.* At that time Mrs Tennyson had limited her reading to the Bible and Dr Cumming's work on prophecy. Another subject of jest was his mother's pet monkey, a clever imp of blackness, that was fond of perching on a pole in the garden, on account of which it was christened by the poet St Simeon Stylites.

In 1848 Tennyson visited Cornwall, when he thought of again taking up the subject of Arthur; and he afterwards spent five weeks in Ireland, the guest of Aubrey de Vere at Curragh Chase. It was not the first time he had crossed the Irish Channel, for so far back as September 1842 he had written to De Vere from Killarney: 'I have been to your Ballybunion Caves, but could not get into the finest on account of the weather.'

At Killarney he again spent a few days, and the echoes of a bugle on that loveliest of lakes was productive of the song introduced into the third edition of *The Princess:* 'The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls.'

In the autumn of the same year he went to Scotland, and in a letter to De Vere at Kilkee, 'by the great deeps,' he gives his impressions: 'I have seen many fine things in Scotland,' he wrote, 'and many fine things did I miss seeing, rolled up as they were tenfold in Scotch mist. . . . I enjoyed no day more than the one I spent at Kirk

Alloway by the monument of poor Burns, and the orchards, and "banks and braes of bonny Doon." I made a pilgrimage thither out of love for the great peasant; they were gathering in the wheat, and the spirit of the man mingled, or seemed to mingle, with all I saw. I know you do not care much for him; but I do, and hold that there never was immortal poet if he be not one.'

CHAPTER VI.

ANNUS MIRABILIS.

TENNYSON'S fame was now well established; England was no longer

A barbarous people,
Blind to the magic,
And deaf to the melody;

and all wild thoughts of emigration had given place to a reassured trust in the ultimate triumph of his own poetic gifts. Of all tributes to his genius, the one that pleased Tennyson most was that of Samuel Bamford. Bamford was a gaunt, stalwart Lancashire handloom weaver and Radical, known to Mrs Gaskell, the novelist. He was passionately fond of repeating some of Tennyson's poems which he had got by heart; and Mrs Gaskell, writing to John Forster, suggested what pleasure it would afford the old weaver if he received a copy of the poems from the author himself. It was managed that Christmas, and Bamford was well-nigh beside himself with joy. 'This is grand,' he said. 'Well, I am a proud man to-day! What must I do for him back again?' 'Oh, you must write to him and thank him.' 'I had rather walk twenty miles than write a letter any day.' 'Well, then,' said Mrs Gaskell, 'suppose you set off this Christmas, and walk, and thank him.' 'Woman!' was the retort, 'walking won't reach him. We are on the earth, don't you see? but he is there, up above. I can no more reach him by walking than if he were an eagle or a skylark high above my head.' And the old man stumbled his way home with open book before him, dangerously heedless of the market-day traffic of the little town. 'I reckon his admiration,' said Tennyson when he heard of it, 'as the highest honour I have yet received.'

That happened in 1849, a time of quiet and preparation, fitting prelude to 1850—Tennyson's *annus mirabilis*, the year of his marriage, of *In Memoriam*, and of the laureateship. Of the winning of Emily Sellwood much will ever remain untold, wife and son preserving what is surely a wise reticence regarding a long period of trial in the closest relationship of the poet's life. For Emily Sellwood and Alfred Tennyson had met in 1830, when she was seventeen and he twenty-one. Arthur Hallam, we are told, was then staying at Somersby with the Tennysons, and asked Emily Sellwood to walk with him in the Fairy Wood. At a turn of the path they came upon Alfred, who at the sight of the slender, beautiful girl of seventeen, in her simple gray dress, suddenly said to her, 'Are you a Dryad or an Oread wandering here?' Once before their orbits had almost crossed, for in his boyhood Tennyson had taken music lessons from Mr Smalley, a well-known teacher in Horncastle; and there may still be seen the house where Emily Sellwood lived as a girl, with its attic windows looking down on the market stalls.

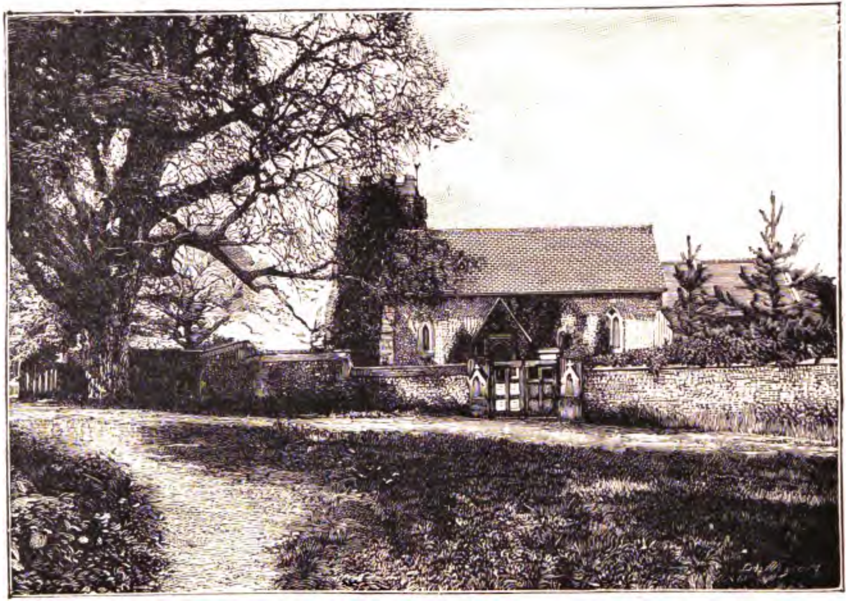
Miss Emily Sellwood was the daughter of a solicitor at

Horncastle, Mr Henry Sellwood, who came of a good old Berkshire stock. She was also niece of the great Arctic explorer, Sir John Franklin, who was Mrs Sellwood's brother. It was in 1836 that the love of the two made itself mutually felt, when Louisa Sellwood married Charles Tennyson, and Emily was her youngest sister's bride's-maid. Tennyson narrates the incident in one of his sonnets. Before the ceremony Emily had been weeping, till her sister, smiling, chid her:

No tears for me!
A happy bride's-maid makes a happy bride.

But weary years had to come between ere the bride's-maid became the bride. An engagement was entered into; but Tennyson was not in a position to marry, and here it was that he faced the severest temptation of his life. Had he chosen to publish then, he might have married; had he chosen to write prose articles for the reviews even, many an editor would have been pleased to add his name to his list of contributors. But Tennyson would not. In a smaller man such a resolve would have been intellectual coxcombry; in Tennyson it was the intuitive recognition of his high calling, the answer to the whisper that lingered in his ear from his dawn of life, steadfast obedience to the command from far, far away to follow the gleam. Great gifts had been given to him to use worthily, and he set his face against giving to the world what he considered immature work. How far Emily Sellwood upheld him in his determination we cannot know for certain, for the extracts from their correspondence published in their son's *Memoir* contain little that is personal; but of her loyalty to his decision we have abundant proof. Her family, however, viewed the matter from a different standpoint; it was hardly to be expected that the poet's sense of consecration would be favourably regarded when it appeared to involve the sacrifice of his betrothed. And so, in 1840, when the prospect of Tennyson making an income sufficient to support his wife—or, for that matter, any income at all—seemed to be as remote as ever, the engagement was broken off by the lady's relatives; and Miss Sellwood and Tennyson silently acquiesced. Ten ripening years passed, and it was in the spring 1850 that Tennyson next met Miss Sellwood at Shiplake-on-the-Thames. Separation had only drawn the two closer together, and the way now seemed clearer. Tennyson had three hundred pounds in bank; Moxon, his publisher, advanced another three hundred pounds; and Mr Sellwood found the household furniture. It did not promise luxury, but it sufficed, and an early date was fixed for the wedding. Meanwhile Tennyson was hard at work at Lincoln's Inn, where he had chambers, preparing the sixth edition of the *Poems* and the third of *The Princess*, and with but little time to write or talk of his approaching marriage. To his friends he was still, as of yore, a storehouse of anecdotes—'the dear old stories and many new ones;' but FitzGerald for one was feeling the atmosphere of middle age about him. 'I wish I could take twenty years off Alfred's shoulders,' he said.

In Shiplake church, with its tower half-clothed with ivy, rich in painted glass windows and carved oak ornaments, on the 13th of June 1850, Alfred and his betrothed were wed. The cake and the dresses arrived too late, and Tennyson used to remark that it was the nicest wedding he had ever been at. The only guests were the bride's father, some of the Lushingtons, and two or three other friends. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. D. Rawnsley, the vicar, a relative of the bride's, and a



Shiplake Church.

native of Lincolnshire. Tennyson and he had long been friends, and it was when staying at Shiplake Rectory that the poet wrote that section of *In Memoriam* commencing 'Sad Hesper o'er the buried sun.'

Their honeymoon-house was Tent Lodge, Coniston, and they settled afterwards in Twickenham, at Chapel House, at the corner of Montpelier Row, which runs from the Thames to the Richmond Road. Twickenham was already famous as the residence of Alexander Pope, and Tennyson's home has thus made it 'twice classic.' Time has allowed creepers to cover the walls of Chapel House; but the poet's study, known as the Green Room, where he wrote the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, remains very much as when he occupied it.

Mrs Browning was a well-wisher. 'How glad I shall be,' she wrote from Florence, 'if it is true that Tennyson is married!' It was at Tent Lodge, Coniston, that Carlyle first met Mrs Tennyson; and he was touched with her thoughtfulness in closing a window on hearing him cough. When introduced he slowly scanned her from head to foot, and then gave her hand a hearty shake. To Mrs Carlyle he wrote:

> Alfred looks really improved, I should say; cheerful in what he talks, and looking forward to a future less detached than the past has been. A good soul, find him where or how situated you may. Mrs Tennyson lights up bright, glittering blue eyes when you speak to her; has wit, has sense; and were it not that she seems so very delicate in health, I should augur really well of Tennyson's adventure.

Carlyle was right. Of all the great literary men of the nineteenth century, not even excepting Robert Browning, Tennyson was most fortunate in his married life. 'The fear of God,' he said in after-life, 'came into my life before the altar when I wedded her.' In all things his wife was his adviser. 'I am proud of her intellect,' he said.

Just before his marriage Tennyson had given *In Memoriam* to the world. It was given anonymously, but from the first the public had little doubt of the authorship. On the evening of one of those sad winter days of 1833–34, Tennyson had already noted down in his notebook some fragmentary lines which proved to be the germ of *In Memoriam;* and for seventeen years the poem, called by Mr Gladstone 'the richest oblation ever offered by the affection of friendship at the tomb of the departed,' had been steadily growing. A somewhat eventful career attaches to the manuscript. Tennyson's carelessness of his papers was proverbial, the manuscript of *Poems, chiefly Lyrical,* having been lost out of his greatcoat-pocket one night when returning from a neighbouring market-town, and reproduced from memory. In 1849 Mr Coventry Patmore, the author of *The Angel in the House,* with whom Tennyson had a few years previously formed a friendship, received a letter from the poet saying that he had left in his lodging in Mornington Place, Hampstead Road, the only manuscript of *In Memoriam,* and asking Mr Patmore to rescue it. Patmore hurried to Mornington Place, to find the rooms occupied by a new lodger, and the landlady very unwilling to submit to a general ransacking of the premises. Eventually, however, she gave way. Patmore was admitted, and the precious document, 'a long, butcher-ledger-like book,' was found in a closet where Tennyson had kept provisions. The completed manuscript was afterwards given by Tennyson to his friend and neighbour at Freshwater, Sir John Simeon, and has since been presented to Trinity College, Cambridge, where it now is. Even after being rescued by Patmore, the manuscript showed an inclination to stray; section xxxix. of the poem, having slipped into the back of a writing-desk, was not included in its context until the issue of 1870.

Mr Gladstone characterises *In Memoriam* as 'surely the noblest monument that ever was erected by one human being to another.' Two other poems on the same sweet and awful subject—the memory of a dead friend—seemed to have gained as much of immortality as it was in the power of the English tongue to bestow—the *Lycidas* of Milton and the *Adonais* of Shelley; but *In Memoriam* has transcended both. That it will always hold a higher place than the *Adonais* is readily granted; but to surpass a poem containing the unity of treatment, the severe and simple beauty, and the winged words of the elder poet was a harder task. Yet assuredly *In Memoriam* has had a larger literary and poetic destiny. Nobly melodious as the *Lycidas* is, Milton's splendid dirge remains a personal wail. As *In Memoriam* progresses the individual note is not destroyed, but it is lost in the universal, till the poem contains the feelings of a whole period.

The keynote of the poem is the separate song, *Break, break, break*, which was written the same year that Arthur Hallam died. *Break, break, break*, is a poem, George Macdonald says, written in a pagan mood. In it knowledge, faith, and hope are nowhere; but it was Tennyson's genuine mood at the time, and out of it grew, ripening slowly from season to season, the perfect fruit of *In Memoriam.* The ninth section of the poem was the first to be written, and then followed sections xxx., xxxi., lxxxv., and xxviii. They were written at many different places, as recollections of Tennyson's intercourse with Hallam suggested the ideas. It was intended, Tennyson has told us, to be not an actual biography, but a kind of *Divina Commedia* founded on Hallam's friendship, on his engagement to the poet's sister, on his sudden death and burial, the whole concluding with the marriage of Cecilia Tennyson, and ending with happiness. After the death of Hallam the divisions of the poem are made by First Christmas Eve (section xxviii.), Second Christmas (lxxviii.), and Third Christmas Eve (civ.). 'I,' Tennyson explains, 'is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking through him.' The strength of the poem lies in its vision of the triumph of life and love; its faith in the ultimate resolution of all discords in an eternal harmony; its conviction that death itself is the proof and absolute guarantee of immortality.

Miss Weld, Tennyson's niece, tells us of a man who, feeling his utter loneliness in a distant colony quite intolerable after the death of his wife, was going in search of the weapon with which to put an end to his existence. He came across a copy of *In Memoriam*, which he had taken out with him from England; and opening its pages, at first half-mechanically, he became interested, and read on and on till there stole into his soul a peace that never afterwards left it, and he resolved once more to fight the battle of life—a battle he did not fight in vain.

In Memoriam was not received with universal applause by the press. The *Times* had what George Macdonald has called 'a brutal review.' One critic considered that a great deal of poetic feeling had been wasted; another remarked: 'These touching lines evidently come from the full heart of a military man's widow;' and a third scoffed at the 'tenderness shown to an Amaryllis of the Chancery Bar.' FitzGerald, who remained all his life dazzled by the early lyrics, complained of its monotony; but Mr Gladstone paid a fine tribute to the poem; whilst Maurice and Kingsley saw in it a step towards the unification of religion and philosophy with scientific progress. The last accounted it 'the noblest Christian poem which England has produced for two centuries.' In a letter to a correspondent, Mrs Browning defended the monotony: 'It is a part of the position,' she said; 'the sea is monotonous, and so is lasting grief. . . . Who that has suffered has not felt wave after wave break dully against one rock, till brain and heart, with all their radiances, seemed lost in a single shadow?'

William Wordsworth died on April 23, 1850, and there were not a few candidates for the vacant poet-laureateship. Leigh Hunt was one; but age was against him, and an imprisonment he had suffered for lampooning the Queen's uncle; Dr Charles Mackay was another; and 'Barry Cornwall,' though not with his own consent. Robert Browning found supporters; but the marked obscurity of his style kept his admirers few. The *Athenæum* suggested the name of Mrs Browning, arguing that, as she was admittedly second only to Tennyson and Browning, a woman might, under the reign of the Queen, be fittingly chosen to wear the laurel. Samuel Rogers was felt to have a claim, and was approached on the subject; but his great age and a consciousness that there was another more deserving led him to decline. The babel of tongues was great; but Tennyson was the popular favourite, and in early winter came the offer of the appointment. The Queen had not forgotten the idyllic charm of *The Miller's Daughter*, and Prince Albert's admiration of *In Memoriam* was profound. Tennyson records that the night before the offer reached him he dreamt that Prince Albert came and kissed him on the cheek. It is interesting to note that although the Queen and Prince Consort were well acquainted with

Tennyson's work, some members of the government were not. 'We know nothing of this gentleman,' wrote Lord Palmerston to Samuel Rogers. 'Are his writings such as befit a laureate to the Queen?'

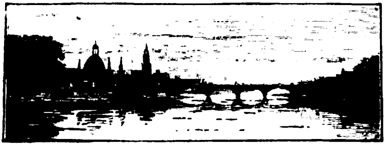
Tennyson's acceptance was by no means a foregone conclusion. 'I have no great passion for courts,' he said, 'but a great love of privacy. It is, I believe, scarce £100 a year, and my friend R. M. Milnes tells me that the price of the patent and court-dress will swallow up all the first year's income.' He wrote two letters, one accepting and one refusing, remaining for a time undecided which to send. 'In the end,' he was wont to say, 'I accepted the honour because during dinner Venables told me that if I became poet-laureate I should always when I dined out be offered the liver-wing of a fowl.' The official warrant, which was dated November 19, 1850, was signed by Lord Breadalbane, then the Lord Chamberlain, and bore that Alfred Tennyson was 'to have, hold, exercise, and enjoy all the rights, profits, and privileges of that office.' The profits of the office were not great, being £127 a year. The £27 was the value of a tierce of canary which was first given annually by Charles I. James II. was mean enough to discontinue the allowance of wine, but it was afterwards restored until commuted in the laureateship of Pye. The first poet-laureate in the modern sense was Spenser, who was granted a pension of £50 by Queen Elizabeth, but the first who received the office by formal letters-patent was Ben Jonson. It was long the duty of the poet-laureate to write an ode on the king's birthday—'his quitrent ode, his peppercorn of praise,' as Cowper has it; but this task fell into abeyance towards the end of the reign of George III., and the laureate was no longer required to be a 'birthday-fibber,' 'a scribbling, self-sold, soul-hired, scorned Iscariot.'

That some poetical debt was due was understood, but the date and manner of payment were now entirely in the poet's option; and this has given to Tennyson's official utterances a spontaneïty, a sincerity, and a grace unequalled in those of his predecessors. Receiving the laurel 'greener from the brows of him that uttered nothing base,' he has passed it on to his successor without a seared or withered leaf.

His formal induction took place on the 6th of March 1851, when he was presented to the Queen at the Buckingham Palace *levée.* He wore Rogers's court-dress, borrowed for the occasion. It was the same suit that Wordsworth had worn at his installation, and that had given him so much trouble in the fitting. Both poets had dressed at Rogers's house before the ceremony.

'The result of the appointment,' Tennyson grumbled, 'is that I get such shoals of poems I am almost crazed with them!' He once made a calculation that the number of poems he received gave him one to read for every three minutes of his life. One day, at Twickenham, a Waterloo soldier brought twelve large cantos on the battle of Waterloo. The veteran had actually taught himself in his old age to read and write that he might thus commemorate Wellington's victory.

Of all Tennyson's laureate utterances, perhaps the lines *Riflemen, Form,* which did so much to inaugurate our volunteer movement, was his most patriotic achievement.



CHAPTER VII.

BY THE QUARRIED DOWNS OF WIGHT.

DURING 1851 Tennyson published little; but his appointment to the laureateship increased the sale of his books, and he was busy supervising the issue of new editions. The seventh edition of the *Poems* contained four new pieces—*To the Queen*, *Edwin Morris*, *The Eagle*, and *Come not when I am dead.* *The Princess* and *In Memoriam* both reached their fourth editions. Miss Power's *Keepsake* was enriched with the lines, *What time I wasted youthful hours*, as well as the fourth of the poems mentioned above; and early in the year a farewell banquet to Macready, the famous actor, called forth a sonnet in his praise. In connection with the verses *To the Queen*, it is interesting to recall that, in a debate in the House of Commons in which Lord John Manners, in support of an argument against political change, had quoted Tennyson's lines:

> A land of old and wide renown,
> Where Freedom broadens slowly down
> From precedent to precedent—

Mr Gladstone, in replying, declaimed with electrical effect the second-last stanza of that poem :

And statesmen at her council met
  Who knew the seasons when to take
  Occasion by the hand, and make
The bounds of Freedom wider yet.

But the year held its shadow, the first of Tennyson's married life. 'Alfred Tennyson, perhaps you heard, is gone to Italy with his wife. Their baby died; they found England wearisome. Alfred has been taken up on the top wave, and a good deal jumbled about since you were here.' So wrote Carlyle to Emerson. The child's death happened on Easter Sunday. 'Dead as he was, I felt proud of him,' wrote Tennyson. 'When I write this down, the remembrance of it rather overcomes me; but I am glad that I have seen him, dear little nameless one, that hast lived though thou hast never breathed! I, thy father, love thee and weep over thee, though thou hast no place in the universe. Who knows? It may be that thou hast. God's will be done.' Of their stay on the Continent at this time Tennyson has given a tender description in *The Daisy*, written after their return, in Edinburgh, 'the gray metropolis of the north.' *The Daisy* contains no mention of Venice, and thereon may be hung a tale. The poet had visited 'the Queen of the Adriatic,' but when asked some time after by Lord John Russell how he had enjoyed it, did not appear communicative; and when further pressed, confessed that he had *not* liked Venice. Asked for a reason, he replied, 'I couldn't get any English tobacco there for love or money.' In Paris they had met the Brownings on their way to England. Mrs Browning thought she saw Tennyson in the Louvre, but was not certain till, looking in the visitors' book, she found his name written—'A. Tennyson, Rentier.' Tennyson insisted that they should take possession of his house and servants at Twickenham, and use them as long as they liked to stay in England. 'Nothing,' says Mrs Browning, 'could be more warmly kind, and we accepted the note in which he gave us the right of possession for the sake of the generous autograph, though we never intended in our own minds to act out the proposition.'

Louis Napoleon's famous *coup d'état*, by which he abolished the constitution of the French Republic, occurred in December 1851. The feeling of war was abroad, and our preparedness for war was much discussed. Not sharing the views of the government of the day, Tennyson early in 1852 contributed anonymously to the *Examiner* three pieces in which he voiced his distrust of Louis Napoleon and his anxiety concerning the national defences—*Britons, guard your own, The Third of February*, and *Hands all round.* Verses commencing, 'How much I love this writer's manly style,' and not included in the complete edition of the poems, appeared on 14th February over the signature 'Taliessin.'

In August, Hallam Tennyson was born at Twickenham, and was there christened, Mr Hallam and Frederick Denison Maurice being godfathers. The latter wrote to Charles Kingsley:

> I hope to be in London on Tuesday: Alfred Tennyson has done me the high honour of asking me to be the godfather to his child, who is to be baptised on that day. I accept the office with thankfulness and fear.

Tennyson, we are told, wished his son to be able to say in after-years, 'My father asked Mr Maurice to be my godfather because he was the truest Christian he knew in the world.' To a correspondent Mrs Browning wrote:

> Mr Tennyson has a little son, and wrote me such three happy notes on the occasion that I really never liked him so well before. I do like men who are not ashamed to be happy beside a cradle.

And again:

> The Tennysons in their kindest words pressed us to be present at their child's christening, which took place last Tuesday, but I could not go; it was not possible. Robert went alone, therefore, and nursed the baby for ten or twelve minutes, to its obvious contentment, he flatters himself. It was christened Hallam Tennyson. Mr Hallam was the godfather and present in his vocation. That was touching, wasn't it?

Thackeray also was present, for he and the poet had long been intimate. Mr Bayard Taylor, the American author, records his having heard Thackeray make the remark that Tennyson was the wisest man he knew; and he adds, 'I could well believe that he was sincere in making it.'

To little Hallam, Tennyson was greatly devoted. 'From the first,' Mrs Tennyson writes to a friend, 'Alfred watched Hallam with interest. Some of his acquaintances would have smiled to see him racing up and down stairs and dandling the baby in his arms.' He was very fond of children always, a favourite saying of his being, 'Make the lives of children as beautiful and as happy as possible;' and his son has given us a delightful picture of the poet as father.

Tennyson's liking for all children was one of the fine traits of his character; it remained with him to the end, and in the last years of his life, when out walking or driving, he used to bark like a dog at the village children to see them smile. One day, before he had got his peerage, a little child of seven was presented to him. Tennyson called her to him, asked her name, kissed her, stroked her sturdy legs, made Mrs Tennyson feel them, and talked to her all the while. Afterwards, when walking up the hill, he said: 'I admire that little girl of yours. It isn't every one that admires that kind of very solid development of flesh and blood, but I do. Old Tom Campbell used to say that children should be like bulbs—plenty of substance for the flower to grow out of by-and-by.'

In November 1852 the Duke of Wellington died, and on the day of his burial Tennyson's noble *Ode* appeared. It was roundly abused by the press; but Sir Henry Taylor wrote: 'It has a greatness worthy of its theme, and an absolute simplicity and truth, with all the poetic passion of your nature moving beneath.' To which Tennyson replied in his own hearty fashion: 'Thanks! Thanks! In the all but universal depreciation of my *Ode* by the press, the prompt and hearty approval of it by a man as true as the Duke himself is doubly grateful.' In later editions the poem was considerably emended, and criticism to-day endorses Sir Henry Taylor's judgment, and pronounces it 'as great a poem as the character was which it celebrated.'

During the next year, the last at Twickenham, an eighth edition of the poems was issued, with a few new pieces added; the *Lines to E. L.* (Edward Lear) was one. On 1st March, Tennyson declined to stand for the Lord Rectorship of Edinburgh University.

The year 1853—during which he visited the Western Highlands, Staffa, and Iona—was a comparatively 'silent' year, there being few products of the poet's pen. And little wonder, for there was a year-old child to play with and distract attention, and a new home to be found. In the fall of the year Tennyson took a lease (with the option of purchase) of Farringford House, in the primrose Isle of Wight, and thus became an 'Islander.' Farringford lies—

> Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns,
> And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea—

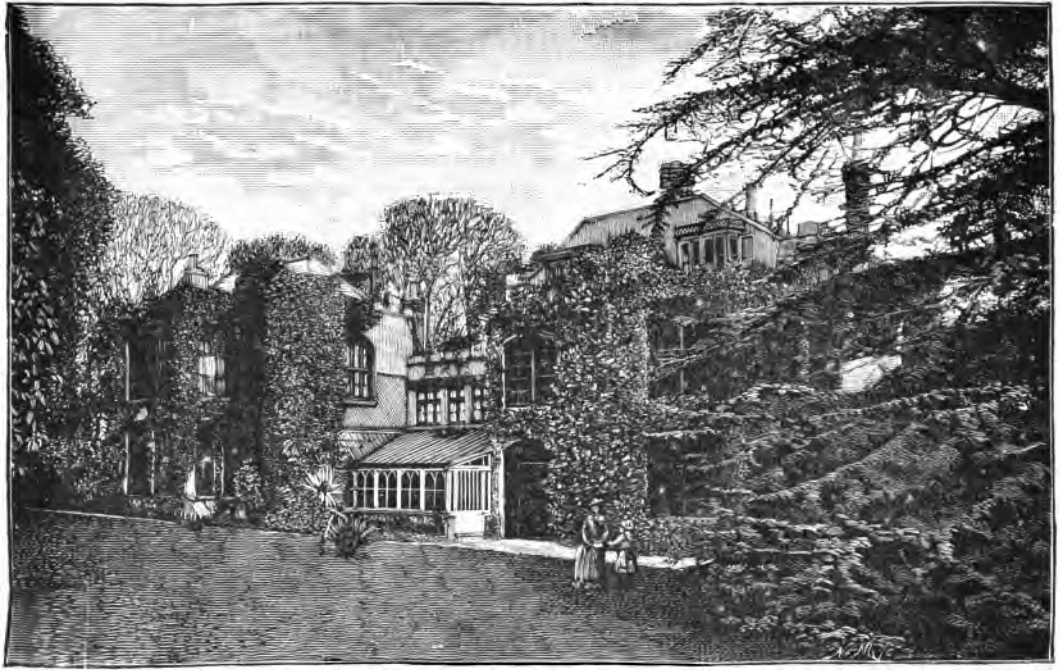
in the parish of Freshwater, in the extreme south-west of the isle, where the land begins to narrow down between the waters of the Solent and the Channel. Forty years ago the rural stillness of Freshwater had not been invaded by the shriek of the steam-engine and the 'elegant seaside villa,' and tranquillity slumbered in its mild southern air. 'When I came to Freshwater,' said Tennyson sorrowfully to a friend in later years, 'it was a labyrinth of lanes.' Many of these have disappeared, but many still remain; and the Freshwater lanes, with their arching elms and hedges of thorn and blackberry, give beauty to the scene. 'Tennyson's Down,' where the air was 'worth sixpence a pint,' rose between the poet's home and the sea. Steep of ascent, wind-swept, and with undulating summits like great land-waves, the downs were, outside his own grounds, Tennyson's favourite haunt; and many were the walks his chosen friends were privileged to take with the tall, cloaked man along the ridges to the old beacon, nearly four hundred and fifty feet above sea-level. The old wooden beacon is now gone, and in its place, on one of the finest sites in all England, is erected to the memory of the poet a graceful and beautiful Iona cross of white Cornish granite, visible from afar. The spot is of historic interest, for there was lighted the beacon that flashed the news of the approach of the Spanish Armada.

Farringford was an old house at the back of the downs, with a thick-set, rambling garden, and groves of fir-trees, where—

The magpies gossip,
Garrulous under a roof of pine.

It was in November 1853 that Tennyson and his wife first saw it; and their son tells us that 'next day, as they gazed from the drawing-room window out through the distant wreath of trees towards a sea of Mediterranean blue, with rosy capes beyond, the down on the left rising above the foreground of undulating park, golden-leaved elms, and chestnuts, and red-stemmed pines, they agreed that they must, if possible, have that view to live with.' 'We will go no farther,' they said; 'this must be our home.' And so it was settled, for Tennyson's income, which in 1850, according to Mrs Browning, was £500, was now rapidly increasing. 'Our poets,' wrote Procter to J. T. Fields, 'are all going to the poorhouse—except Tennyson.' The poet and his wife took to a country life at once, superintending the management of their little farm, and caring for the poor and sick, to whom they were ever most courteous and kind. Lady Tennyson's memory is green to-day in Freshwater. 'She was the kindest, most beautiful-speaking woman I have ever met, sir,' said an old man, speaking of her with the tears in his eyes. 'God bless her!' Tennyson was a good farmer, loving his herds and proud of his mutton. In 1854 his second son, Lionel, was born.

During the forty years of his life at Freshwater, Tennyson made many friends; and among the first and truest was Sir John Simeon, whose seat of Swainston is an hour's drive from Farringford. They had first met at Lady



Farringford, Freshwater, Isle of Wight.

Ashburton's in London; and Carlyle, walking home with Sir John, remarked of the poet: 'There he sits upon a dungheap, surrounded by innumerable dead dogs,' referring to the poet's classical inspirations. Taxed afterwards by Tennyson with having made the observation, Carlyle apologetically replied: 'Eh, but that wasn't a very luminous description of you.' Sir John Simeon and Tennyson became constant companions; and the former's daughter tells us that, during the early years at Farringford, it was one of her father's great and frequent pleasures to ride or drive over in the summer afternoons.

But Tennyson's closest friend at Farringford was Nature. The primroses and snowdrops, and other flowers, were a constant delight to him. 'I have known him,' writes Sir John Simeon's daughter, 'stop short in a sentence to listen to a blackbird's song, to watch the sunlight glint on a butterfly's wing, or to examine a field-flower at his feet. The lines, *Flower in the Crannied Wall*, were the result of an investigation of the "love-in-idleness" growing on a wall in Farringford garden. He made them nearly on the spot, and said them to me next day.' His observation was most close and accurate; and another friend tells us that almost the first time he ever walked out with Tennyson, the poet told him to look and tell him if the field-lark did not come down sideways upon its wing. His niece, Miss Weld, says that she can well remember the look on his face when he met her one day returning from his meadows with a wheelbarrow full of fading daffodils, plucked by her with the lavish hand of a child. He gazed at them very sorrowfully, and in gentle words expressed his regret that so much beautiful life had been needlessly sacrificed. He never willingly took part in the destruction of life, and mourned the occasional cutting down of his trees as if they were personal friends. One morning he had risen early and climbed the downs to watch the changing hues of dawn, when he was stopped by an ugly sight. The previous night the gorse had been set afire, and on the burnt ground lay a few helpless victims—little birds and charred rabbits. The day was breaking in its splendour; but, turning back, the poet walked sadly home, and, going upstairs to his room, burst into tears.

In 1854 a tribute was paid to the poet by Dr Kane and his comrades of the Second Grinnell Expedition in search of Sir John Franklin. Sighting at sea a tapering pillar, 480 feet high, on a pedestal 280 feet high, to the north of latitude 79 degrees, they gave it the name of Tennyson's Monument. In the following year came the news of Sir John Franklin's death in the arctic regions, a great shock to his niece, Mrs Tennyson. A cape in the arctic circle, a lake in New Zealand, and a village in Canada have also been named after the laureate.

In the beginning of December the *Times* contained a description of the splendid but foolish charge at Balaklava, in which occurred the phrase 'some one had blundered;' and a few minutes after reading the paper Tennyson wrote his memorable *Charge of the Light Brigade*. The verses, which appeared in *The Examiner* for December 9, became extremely popular with our Crimean heroes; and in August 1855 a quarto sheet of four pages was published containing them, with the following note at the bottom:

> Having heard that the brave soldiers before Sebastopol, whom I am proud to call my countrymen, have a liking for my ballad on the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava, I have ordered a thousand copies of it to be printed for them. No writing of mine can add to the glory they have acquired in the Crimea;

but if what I have heard be true, they will not be displeased to receive these copies of the ballad from me, and to know that those who sit at home love and honour them.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

8th August 1855.

It is recorded that one of the survivors of the charge was long after laid up in hospital in Scutari from the effects of a kick from a horse. Depression of spirits prevented him throwing off the disease; the doctor tried leeches without effect, and other remedies also failed. One day Tennyson's poem was read to him. With kindling eye the man at once proceeded to describe the fatal gallop. He then begged to hear the poem again, and in a few days was discharged as cured. On giving the card the doctor was heard to murmur, 'Well done, Tennyson!'

We must not forget the lovely lines of invitation addressed, in the beginning of 1854, to his friend, Frederick Denison Maurice, who at this time sorely needed friendship to support him under ecclesiastical persecution.

In June 1855 Oxford University conferred on Tennyson the degree of Doctor. At the ceremony 'there was one great shout for *In Memoriam;*' and as the poet, with his rough and straying locks, came forward, an undergraduate from the gallery shouted: '*Did* they wake and call you too early this morning?' The same year saw the publication of *Maud.* As already mentioned, the lines, *O that 'twere possible*, contributed long before to *The Tribute*, contained the germ of the poem, which was written in response to a remark of Sir John Simeon's, that to render the lines fully intelligible a preceding poem was necessary. Tennyson wrote it; it also required a predecessor, and so the whole poem was written backwards. Thus Tennyson owed the favourite child of his pen first to the hot-tempered pertinacity of Richard Monckton Milnes, and then to a chance comment of Sir John Simeon. When asked to read aloud from his own poetry, he generally chose *Maud*, *The Ode on the Duke of Wellington*, or *Guinevere*.

When first published *Maud* met with a very adverse reception, largely owing to the public failing to perceive that it was essentially dramatic, and not a transcript of the poet's views. Mr Gladstone, who was then combating the growth of the war-spirit, thought he found in it views antagonistic to his own convictions, and reviewed it unfavourably in the *Quarterly*. On discovering his mistake he publicly recanted. 'No one but a noble-minded man would have done that,' Tennyson used to say. When it was still in manuscript Tennyson read it aloud to Mrs Carlyle, and asked her what she thought of it. Her reply the first time was: 'I think it is perfect *stuff!*' Slightly discouraged, the laureate read it once more; upon which Mrs Carlyle remarked, 'It sounds better this time;' and on a third reading she confessed that she liked it very much. The Brownings were in England that autumn, and Tennyson visited them in London, and read to them his new poem; and it was while he was thus employed that Rossetti drew the well-known portrait of the laureate in pen and ink. To a correspondent Mrs Browning has given the following description of his visit:

> One of the pleasantest things which has happened to us here is the coming down on us of the laureate, who, being in London for three or four days from the Isle of Wight, spent two of them with us, dined with us, smoked with us, opened his heart to us (and the second bottle of port), and ended by reading *Maud* through from end to end, and going away at half-past two in the morning. If I had had a heart to spare, certainly he would have won mine. He is captivating with his frankness, confidingness, and unexampled *naïveté!* Think of his stopping *Maud* every

now and then—'There's a wonderful touch! That's very tender! How beautiful that is!' Yes, and it *was* wonderful, tender, beautiful, and he read exquisitely, in a voice like an organ, rather music than speech.

To have won the approval of the Brownings was compensation for many 'mosquito-stings;' and Sir Henry Taylor and Jowett also poured balm on Tennyson's wounded feelings. The mosquitoes were the *Times*, the *Daily News*, the *Literary Gazette*, *Blackwood*, and other papers and magazines, the writer of a protest entitled *Vindiciæ Pacis*, and an obscure poet who rushed into print with a so-called *Anti-Maud.* It was the personalities indulged in by the writers that touched Tennyson to the quick. 'I hate spite,' he said. Many people, like Mr Gladstone, were apprehensive that Tennyson loved war. The truth is he loathed it, although he advocated the war of defence and of liberty. 'Peace at any price,' he said, 'implies war at all cost.'

Time has vindicated *Maud*, which contains much of outdoor nature and much of Freshwater scenery, as the loveliest of Tennyson's longer poems; and, unfavourably received as it was, it nevertheless sold from the first, and with the proceeds the poet was able to purchase his ivied home of Farringford.

During the next three years Tennyson lived very quietly at Freshwater, busy with his *magnum opus*, the *Idylls of the King*, the main scheme of which he had been evolving for twenty years. Of visitors he had full share—Bayard Taylor, who described him as 'tall and broad-shouldered as a son of Anak, with hair, beard, and eyes of southern darkness;' Sydney Dobell, the poet, who records that 'the country people are much amazed at his bad hat and his unusual ways, and devoutly believe that he writes his poetry while mowing the lawn;' and not the least frequently Prince Albert, the Prince Consort. One day the Prince drove over from Osborne, when, as it happened, the Twickenham furniture had just arrived at Farringford, and every room was in confusion—chairs, tables, and books in wild disarray. The maid, hearing the Prince's name announced, stood stock-still, not knowing what to do, and at length the equerry took her by the shoulders and turned her round, bidding her lead them in.

The year 1856 brought its anxieties in the threatened suspension of the bank in which Tennyson's savings were invested. When the news came, to give his wife courage, he made her play and sing the Welsh national air; and to fill their minds, they hung their Michael Angelo engravings round their drawing-room. Happily, the danger was averted. The following year the poet paid a visit to Manchester Exhibition, where Nathaniel Hawthorne saw him, but was too shy to seek an introduction. 'Gazing at him with all my eyes,' he says, 'I liked him well, and rejoiced more in him than in all the wonders of the exhibition.' In 1858 the poet toured in Norway, and visited the Duke of Argyll at Inveraray. In the following year he spent some weeks in Portugal. The latter year was darkened by the death of Mr Hallam, the historian; and on hearing the sad news the poet read parts of *In Memoriam*, dwelling on the passages that moved him most.

Among the 'Islanders' at Freshwater, Tennyson grew to be much loved, although their manner of expressing liking and admiration was sometimes naïve. 'Have you seen him?' said a workman to his fellow shortly after Tennyson came to Farringford—they were engaged in building a new study for the poet. 'What sort of a chap is he?' 'Oh, well enough for an *overner*,' replied the other, who was of the general 'Island' opinion that no good could be expected from *over* the sea.

One day, many years later, Tennyson's niece was reading, as her wont was, some of her uncle's poems to an old shepherd of his who had been pensioned. 'Well, miss, but that was fine,' said the old man. 'What a headpiece he must have on him, to be sure! You'd never think it now to look at him.' 'Oh yes, shepherd,' replied the niece; 'why, I think he has a beautiful, noble face.' 'Well, well, miss,' insisted the pensioner, 'that may be; but you'd never think it, any way, to hear him talk.'

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM MAGIC CASEMENT.

IN 1859 appeared the *Idylls of the King*, four in number—*Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*. Three years later the dedication was added ; in 1869 *The Coming of Arthur*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Etarre*, and *The Passing of Arthur ;* in 1871 *The Last Tournament ;* and in 1885 *Balin and Balan*. Written and published at different times, the various poems of the *Idylls* were not produced in their artistic order. The epic grew, in fact, somewhat in the manner of *Maud* and *In Memoriam*. At twenty-four the idea of an Arthurian epic seems to have possessed the poet's mind, and he reckoned that twenty years would be required for the task. Its execution was delayed by the death of Arthur Hallam and the composition of *In Memoriam*. So long previously as 1832, *The Lady of Shalott* had foreshadowed the enterprise ; and *Sir Galahad*, *Sir Launcelot*, and *Queen Guinevere* and the *Morte d'Arthur* had marked stages in its development.

Tennyson shrank long from the composition of the *Holy Grail*, in which the spiritual idea of the epic culminates, fearing that he could not touch the theme without sacrilege.

We find the Duke of Argyll, always an intimate friend, constantly stimulating him to the task. At last 'it came like a breath of inspiration,' and was 'almost finished in about a week.'

Tennyson considered it one of the most imaginative of his poems, expressing his strong feeling as to the reality of the Unseen. 'The general English view of God,' he said, 'is of an immeasurable clergyman; and some mistake the devil for God.'

The 1859 volume met with instantaneous success, ten thousand copies being sold in a few weeks. Carlyle stood almost alone in his want of appreciation. To Emerson he wrote:

> We read at first Tennyson's *Idylls* with profound recognition of the finely-elaborated execution, and also of the inward perfection of *vacancy*, and, to say truth, with considerable impatience at being treated so very like infants, though the lollipops were so superlative. We gladly changed for one of Emerson's *English Traits*.

FitzGerald was inclined to join in Carlyle's querulous mood; and there is this to be said in mitigation of their criticism, that the allegorical meaning of the *Idylls* could hardly be discovered so readily then, when published fragmentarily, as now in their completed form.

Dickens was enthusiastic, and wrote to a correspondent:

> How fine the *Idylls* are! Lord! what a blessed thing it is to read a man who can write! I thought nothing could be grander than the first poem till I came to the third; but when I had read the last it seemed to be absolutely unapproached and unapproachable.

Ruskin's opinion was that, as a description of various nobleness and tenderness, the book was without price. And Thackeray wrote:

About three weeks ago, when I was ill in bed, I read the *Idylls of the King*, and I thought 'Oh, I must write to him now for this pleasure, this delight, this splendour and happiness which I have been enjoying!' But I should have blotted the sheets; 'tis ill writing on one's bed.

Prince Albert wrote asking the poet to write his name in his copy of the book. Two years later a new edition of the *Idylls* appeared, dedicated to the memory of the beloved Prince. Then it was, in April 1862, that Tennyson had his first private interview with the Queen. Before the event he wrote to the Duke of Argyll: 'I am a shy beast, and like to keep in my burrow. Two questions: what sort of salutation to make on entering her private room? and whether to retreat backward, or sidle out as I may?' Tennyson related that she stood pale and statue-like before him, speaking in a quiet, unutterably sad voice. 'There was a kind of stately innocence about her.' She said many things to him, such as, 'Next to the Bible, *In Memoriam* is my comfort.' It is not too much to say that the acquaintance then begun grew to a friendship, restrained but beautiful, on both sides.

In the year of publication of the *Idylls* a little breeze sprang up at Cambridge in connection with the bust of Tennyson by Woolner, the sculptor, which had been presented to Trinity College. The poet's admirers wished it placed in the library, but this was opposed as too high an honour for any living man. The opposition was successful, and the bust, now in the library, for some time stood without in the vestibule. FitzGerald, when he heard of it, wrote:

I read or was told they wouldn't let old Alfred's bust into your Trinity. They are right, I think, to let no one in there (as it should be in Westminster Abbey) till a hundred years are past,

when, after too much admiration (perhaps), and then a reaction of undue disesteem, men have settled into some steady opinion on the subject; supposing always that the hero survives so long, which of itself goes far to decide the question. No doubt Alfred Tennyson will do ***that.***

In 1860 Thackeray, who had become editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, with great pride secured a poem from Tennyson. Tennyson was far from congratulating the novelist on his new position. 'I am sorry,' he wrote, 'you have engaged, for any quantity of money, to let your brains be sucked periodically by Smith, Elder, & Co. Not that I don't like Smith, who seems, from the very little I have seen of him, liberal and kindly; but that so great an artist as you should go to work after this fashion.'

From 1859 to 1864 was a period of rest with Tennyson, the rest which work of another stamp affords; and the *Idylls of the King* gave place for the nonce to *Enoch Arden, Aylmer's Field*, *The Grandmother*, *Sea Dreams*, *The Northern Farmer*, *The Sailor Boy*, *The Flower*, and other pieces which in the latter year were issued in a volume entitled *Enoch Arden, and other Poems*, although the poet's first intention had been to call it *Idylls of the Hearth*. *The Dedication* was the only Arthurian piece. If we may judge from the sales, from the many translations, and from countless letters received by the poet, it proved, with the exception perhaps of *In Memoriam*, the most popular of all his volumes, sixty thousand copies being disposed of within a very short time; and it won for him the title of the 'Poet of the People.' He was specially delighted with a remark a poor woman made to a district visitor who was distributing tracts, and who had lately read to her part of *Enoch Arden*: 'Thank you, ma'am; but I'd give all for that other beautiful tract which you read t'other day; it did me a power of good.'

Probably no simple tale was ever so nobly told by any poet of our land as *Enoch Arden*. James Spedding, the philosopher, glowed with delight over it, and thought it a tale especially adapted to Tennyson's genius. The theme had been suggested by Woolner, the sculptor, and was founded on a Suffolk tale, although the story is to be met with in Brittany and elsewhere, and has been plagiarised in real life more than once since the publication of the poem.

Enoch Arden was the most rapidly written of all Tennyson's longer pieces, taking only about a fortnight; and his son tells us that he penned it in a little summer-house in the meadow called Maiden's Croft, looking over Freshwater Bay and towards the downs. He made his lines as he paced up and down in the meadow, and then wrote them down in the summer-house. 'He makes *poets* for the Queen,' said a Freshwater boy once in answer to a lady's inquiry if he knew Mr Tennyson; 'p'liceman often sees him walking about a-making of 'em under the stars.' Not so far astray as another country legend that he composed his rhymes following the plough.

The Northern Farmer was not a photograph, being founded on the dying words of a farm-bailiff when nearly eighty: 'God A'mighty little knows what He 's about, a-taking me. An' squire will be so mad an' all.' *The Flower* was intended to have a universal and not a personal application; as already mentioned, it grew from a chance examination one day of the 'love-in-idleness' growing at Farringford.

The year 1864 was made memorable at Farringford by Garibaldi's visit. 'What a noble human being!' wrote Tennyson of him to the Duke of Argyll. 'I expected to see a hero, and I was not disappointed. One cannot exactly say of him what Chaucer says of the ideal knight, "as meke he was of port as is a maid;" he is more majestic than meek, and his manners have a certain divine simplicity in them, such as I have never witnessed in a native of these islands, among men at least, and they are gentler than those of most young maidens whom I know.' In this year, at the Queen's request, he wrote some lines for the Duchess of Kent's statue in the mausoleum at Frogmore.

The following year, 1865, was one of unusual quiet. In February, Tennyson's mother died, aged eighty-four, full of years and honour. Her last words, when asked how she was, were, 'Very quiet;' and so little sting was there in the passing that her son wished they could have gone to the funeral in white and gold. Another death this year was that of his friend James Stephen Rice. A selection from the *Poems* was brought out in threepenny numbers, and dedicated to the 'Working Men of England.' It included six new pieces. Among the guests at Farringford was Sir Richard Owen, the famous zoologist, full of ideas and anecdotes; and Mrs Tennyson records in her diary a ghastly story of his medical student days, of a negro's head he had been carrying slipping from his arms, bounding down a hill, and bursting through a window into the midst of a quiet family at tea. After it came the future Sir Richard, who clutched at it, and 'bolted' without a word. A brief holiday was spent visiting Waterloo and Weimar—where they wandered among the haunts of Goethe and Schiller—and Dresden. On the last day of the year the poem '1865–66' was written.

In 1866 Hallam Tennyson, accompanied by his father, went to school at Marlborough to be under Dean Bradley. In the following year the boy was seriously ill with an attack on the lungs, and Tennyson, who was wrapped up in him, gave up hope. 'I have made up my mind,' he said, 'to lose him: God will take him pure and good straight from his mother's lessons. Surely it would be better for him than to grow up such a one as I am.' Happily, however, he recovered.

A great to-do arose in England in 1866 over the prompt and severe repression of a rebellion of blacks in Jamaica by Governor Eyre. Edward John Eyre had been a pupil at Louth Grammar School soon after Tennyson left it. Of all his actions Tennyson did not approve, and said so; but he had little sympathy with the ill-advised prosecution of Eyre for cruelty, and, along with Carlyle, Ruskin, and Kingsley, subscribed to the governor's defence-fund, forfeiting thereby his popularity with a certain section of the community.

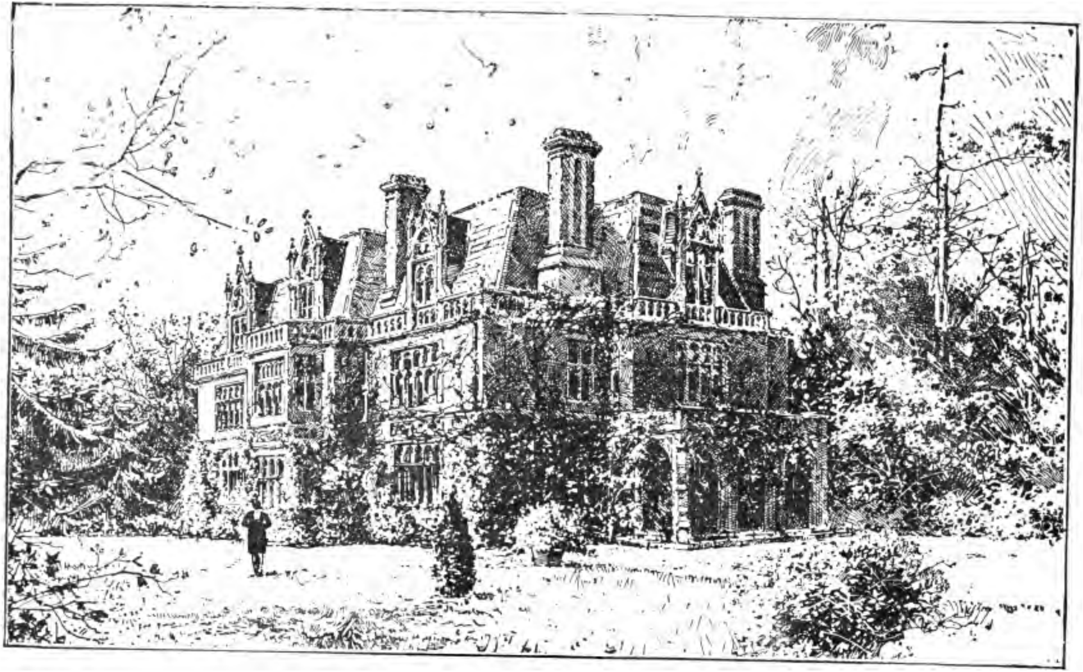
By this time Tennyson was finding the intrusion of tourists and sightseers at Farringford simply unbearable; and in March 1867 he wrote to F. T. Palgrave that he had taken rooms in a farmhouse for two years. 'I don't give the name of the place,' he added, 'because I wish it to be kept secret: I am not flying from the Cockneys here to tumble in among the Cockneys there, I hope.' The Cockney sightseers, but oftener perhaps the American tourists and poet-worshippers, were a continual annoyance to Tennyson; and it is told that he once fled before a flock of sheep, mistaking them, through his short-sightedness, for a troop of his relentless enemies. Mr Fytche, a cousin of the poet, tells how on one occasion a burly tourist determined to exploit Farringford and its famous occupant; and finding that no assistance was to be had from the landlord of the neighbouring inn, set off by himself, and after an adventurous struggle with thorn-hedges and barbed wire, succeeded in reaching the lawn, and, climbing one of the great trees, waited patiently for a sight of the laureate.

His pertinacity was rewarded, for presently Tennyson came out with some young ladies who were staying in the house, and they began to play tennis.

Alfred was tossing about the tennis-balls—he didn't actually play the game—when a noise in the trees above them attracted attention. 'It is a carrion crow,' said Tennyson, who always spoke of the rooks as crows; and they went on. But the prying Tom perched up in the branches was finding his refuge draughty and uncomfortable, and further rustlings, still attributed by Tennyson to a crow, culminated in a violent fit of sneezing, about which there could be no mistake. Tennyson was greatly angered, and called out to him, 'Come down, you villain!' the gardener with his gun at the same time being sent for. The 'villain' came down ignominiously enough, all his valour and determination being gone, and begged to be forgiven. 'I will forgive you,' said Tennyson, 'on one condition. Promise that you will go away at once and *never* come back to this island.' The man promised, and took himself off.

On another occasion, at Aldworth, when Tennyson was entertaining some friends, among whom were several bishops, a party of Americans marched up to the front door and demanded to see Alfred Tennyson. The poet, followed by his friends, fled to his sanctum at the top of the house, but his uninvited guests declined to leave. In the end the happy thought struck Tennyson to cast a bishop to the wolves, and one was accordingly sent down to do hospitality. The tactics were entirely successful, and the Americans departed quite satisfied.

The farmhouse Tennyson referred to was at Hindhead, on the Surrey downs; and by another year he had purchased an estate in the neighbourhood, and on April 23, 1868, Shakespeare's birthday, he laid the foundation-stone of Aldworth. The ground had formerly been called Blackhorse-copse, and got its new name from a village in Berks



Aldworth House, Sussex.

whence Mrs Tennyson's ancestors had come. The house, designed by Mr Knowles, editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, who was also an architect, was of modern Gothic style, with wide mullioned windows, many-angled oriels in shady recesses, and dormers whose gables and pinnacles, 'like quills upon the fretful porcupine,' break the sky-line picturesquely. Around the building ran a band of leaves in stone interlacing the Latin inscription, 'Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men;' whilst the Welsh motto, 'Y gwir yn erbyn y byd' ('The truth against the world'), was also prominent. Aldworth was secluded enough, and Tennyson enjoyed comparative immunity from the curious, whose mode of worship had been to flatten their inquisitive noses against his windows. Under the crest of Blackdown, near Haslemere, Aldworth proved more bracing than Farringford, and better suited to Mrs Tennyson's delicate health. The view from it is superb:

Green Sussex fading into blue,
With one gray glimpse of sea—

a land of pine, furze, and whortleberry, park and forest, heather, moor, and lowland village church and hall, cornfield and homestead. 'Tennyson,' wrote Lord Houghton, 'has built himself a handsome and commodious house in a most inaccessible site, with every comfort he can require, and every discomfort to all who approach him. What can be more poetical?' But the bard's 'every comfort' did not impress his commoner neighbours, who lived in a much more pretentious style; and one of them is said to have remarked, when asked if Tennyson was a great man, 'Well, I don't well know what you call great, but he only keeps one man-servant, and *he* doesn't sleep in the house.' Of Tennyson's plain living, and his courtesy both as guest and host, there have been different accounts; but the testimony of the poet's niece, Miss Weld, may be accepted as conclusive:

> 'When my uncle,' she writes, 'stayed in our house in London I well remember the almost Spartan simplicity of the fare he insisted on our giving him. We knew he liked plain boiled salt beef, but were scarcely prepared for his begging to be allowed to have it (instead of the fresh roasts we had cooked for him) three days running, cold, for his dinner. No guest ever gave so little trouble or was so full of consideration for our servants; but this was because he was always full of thought for others, a little instance of which comes into my mind, the occasion being a visit my mother and I paid to Farringford when my aunt happened to be away for a few hours. Tennyson came into our room to see if it was all comfortable, and, disagreeing with the housemaid, who had thought the weather too warm to light the fire, said, "Oh, this doesn't look half a welcome," and, dropping on his knees, lighted it and fanned it into a bright flame.'

The summer of 1868 was made memorable by visits to Farringford of Longfellow and Darwin; the latter, Mrs Tennyson records in her *Journal*, 'kindly, unworldly, and agreeable.' In the autumn *The Holy Grail* was begun, and was in the hands of the printer in November. It had been read to Browning, who pronounced it the poet's 'best and highest.' A matter of business which caused much worry and not a little regret was the change of publisher, rendered necessary through the death of Mr E. Moxon. It was the severing of a connection of thirty-seven years; but Tennyson made an allowance to Mr Moxon's widow and family. Some five poems were published during the year in the magazines. The study of Hebrew was a great delight to Tennyson at this time, occupying his whole mind. Most people, he said, knew nothing of the Song of Solomon, having read it only in the coarsely-painted English version, One event of 1869 was a tour in Switzerland with Mr Frederick Locker-Lampson, who had made Tennyson's acquaintance some five years earlier, and who has made some vivid pen-sketches of the journey—in the Paris theatres, at one of which they were squeezed into a little box almost touching the ceiling, and cheek-by-jowl with an enormous chandelier, a position which Tennyson said was 'like being stuck on a spike over hell;' at the Grindelwald *Aigle*, playing battledore and shuttlecock in the pension, and deeply interested in a young, lately married, and superlatively happy couple; at Strasburg, expostulating with a pretty waitress on the softness of her eggs and the apparent hardness of her heart; and at Paris once more, where the poet was afflicted with gout, and let his companion do the packing while he sat on the bed and smoked, grumbling the while at the tightness of the coat he had on, which by-and-by was found to be Locker-Lampson's. Delightful thumb-nail drawings they are—not of Tennyson the poet but of Tennyson the man. In the same year *The Holy Grail* was published, and the volume also contained *Lucretius*, *The Coming of Arthur*, *The Passing of Arthur*, *Flower in the Crannied Wall*, and several others.

In May of the following year a blow fell on the poet in the death of his dear friend Sir John Simeon—'Prince of Courtesy,' he called him.

The *Window Songs*, with music by Arthur Sullivan, were published by Mr Strahan in the end of the year. They had been privately printed at the Canford Manor Press in 1867. Tennyson was loath to publish what he called trivial songs at such a crisis in the affairs of Europe, for the gathering cloud of the Franco-German war was black overhead, but he had given his promise to Mr Sullivan. 'I am sorry,' he said, 'that my four-year-old puppet should have to dance at all in the dark shadow of these days; but the music is now completed, and I am bound by my promise.' The songs had been pirated before this date, and unscrupulously published in America, the dishonest possessor of the copy having asked £250 for the twelve poems. About this time Tennyson and his publishers found it necessary to take steps to check the influx from America and the Continent of copies of his poems, and Disraeli was approached on the subject. Proceedings were also taken in the Court of Session at Edinburgh, and eventually a Glasgow bookseller was fined £500 for defying the order of the Court. That, however, a line was drawn by the poet himself between incautious and fraudulent use of his writings is shown by an incident in connection with his dealings with Edward Moxon. After Moxon's death his trustees detected in *The Months, Illustrated by Pen and Pencil*, a large volume containing selections from the writings of many poets, three brief extracts from Tennyson. A demand was accordingly made to the publishers of the book, the Religious Tract Society, for payment of £75 in respect of the infringement of copyright. The Society paid the claim; but on the next statement of the Society's accounts being laid before Tennyson, he saw the entry respecting the infringement of his copyright, and promptly forwarded a cheque to the Society for the full amount that had been, properly enough, exacted by the representatives of his publishers.

Turgenief, the Russian novelist, 'a tall, large, white-haired man, with a strong face,' who told Russian stories with great power and vivacity; George Eliot, whom Tennyson thought 'like the picture of Savonarola;' and Mr Huxley, 'chivalrous, wide, and earnest,' were among the notables the poet met in 1871. In the following year the golden circle of the *Idylls* was all but completed with the publication of *Gareth and Lynette*. Thirteen years later it was reopened for a moment only to admit *Balin and Balan*, an introduction to *Merlin and Vivian*, which the poet considered to be necessary. So the great task was ended, thanks not a few to Mr Knowles, at whom the poet was wont to point his finger with a grim smile, and say, 'I was often urged to go on with the *Idylls*, but I stuck; and then this beast said, "Do it," and I did it.' The epilogue to the *Idylls*, which contains a well-known passage commencing, 'And that true North,' was written in answer to an article in the *Times* advocating the separation of Canada from the mother-country. Lord Dufferin, who was then Lieutenant-Governor of the Dominion, wrote in heart-felt gratitude: 'Your noble words have struck responsive fire from every heart; they have been published in every newspaper, and have been completely effectual to heal the wounds occasioned by the senseless language of the *Times*.' And in another letter he said: 'Canada may well be proud that her loyal aspirations should be thus imperishably recorded in the greatest poem of this generation.' Mrs Tennyson records in her *Journal* how her husband burned with shame and indignation when an eminent statesman said to him, 'Would to God Canada would go!'

The year 1873 brought with it the offer of a baronetcy. Tennyson asked for time to consider, and then wrote refusing. He asked that it should not be construed into a slight of the proffered honour. 'I hope,' he said, 'that I have too much of the old-world loyalty left in me not to wear my lady's favours against all comers should you think it would be more agreeable to her Majesty that I should do so.' The simple fact was that he and his wife preferred to remain plain Mr and Mrs; but they could have wished the title gifted to their son Hallam. Hallam, however, did not care to wear the honour during his father's lifetime, and Mr Gladstone was dubious of the propriety of bestowing a vicarious baronetcy after the poet's death. It was clean against all precedent. Still, the innovation might be attempted. In the following year Mr Disraeli, who in the interval had returned to power, wrote repeating the offer. Tennyson wrote again expressing his wishes. The Prime Minister, however, could not see his way to accede to the poet's proposals, and so the matter dropped. Unquestionably the refusal was popular in the country, which loved to think and talk of 'Alfred Tennyson,' and many did not soon reconcile themselves to his subsequent acceptance of a peerage.

Publishing worries again troubled the poet in 1873. Mr King, who had been in partnership with Mr Strahan, broke away from him, and the poet elected to go with the former. Although Messrs Strahan & Co. had paid Tennyson liberally (£5000 per annum for the right to publish his old volumes), they were not losers in their dealings with him.

Mention must here be made of the famous Metaphysical Society, which was founded in 1869 by Tennyson, Professor Pritchard, and Mr Knowles, the editor of the *Nineteenth Century*. An 'Apostles' Club' of former days, it owed its name to Lady Augusta Stanley, and embraced in its membership some of the foremost thinkers of the time—Dean Stanley, Ward, Seeley, Martineau, Carpenter, Huxley, Tyndall, Hutton, Froude, Gladstone, Manning, Alford, Mark Pattison, the Duke of Argyll, Ruskin, Morley, Leslie Stephen, and F. D. Maurice. The meetings took place at the Grosvenor Hotel, in London, and the 'feast of reason and flow of soul' were preceded by a social evening meal. Although the members were so opposite and divergent in their opinions and dispositions, the discussions were quite peaceable; and if they did not succeed in convincing each other at the time, they learned mutual respect, and gradually there was a healthy modification of opposing views. At one of the preliminary meetings Tennyson humorously remarked that modern science ought at all events to have taught men to separate light from heat, and this was adopted as the rule of the Society. After lasting a decade, it died in 1880, as Huxley asserted, 'of too much love;' but Tennyson declared that it perished because, after ten years of strenuous effort, no one had succeeded in even defining the term metaphysics. Tennyson never spoke in the society; but if he was not heard he was felt, and his silent influence was often more powerful than words.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LONG AFTERNOON.

IN 1875 Tennyson startled the public by appearing in a new rôle—that of dramatist. *Queen Mary*, his first play, was published in that year, and acted in a condensed form at the Lyceum Theatre in London. *Harold* followed in 1876; *The Falcon* was acted in 1879, *The Cup* in 1881, *The Promise of May* in 1882; and *Becket* was published in 1885. The trilogy of plays, *Harold*, *Becket*, and *Queen Mary*, the poet intended as three parts of one theme: the making of England. The first embodies a racial struggle for supremacy—Saxon, Norman, Dane at death-grips; in *Becket* the antagonists are Church and Crown, and in *Queen Mary* the old faith and the new.

Neither critics nor public appreciated the new medium in which their poet, at sixty-five years of age, had resolved to work, and they never have reconciled themselves to the innovation. For forty years and more he had been a lyric poet, an epic poet, a didactic poet; and so used to those three ruts had his readers grown that they refused to admit that a fourth could be made. That the plays contained many passages of singular strength and surpassing beauty all were prepared to admit, yet it was tacitly agreed to presuppose that drama was a literary form not suited to Tennyson's genius. Such criticism was ignorant of Tennyson's lifelong interest in the theatre and the drama. It was nothing to it that at fourteen he had written plays extraordinary for a boy, that acting had been a favourite amusement at Cambridge, that charades with his children were a frequent pastime, that he had been a constant playgoer and an esteemed critic. 'You should have been one of us, sir,' an actor had once said to him. But if the lazy public were incredulous, and the busy newspaper-man shrugged the shoulders and spared no time to consider, those whose opinions were most worth having wrote hearty words of encouragement. George H. Lewes and George Eliot were enthusiastic, and urged him to persevere. 'The wretched critics,' wrote the former, 'who would dissuade you from enriching literature with such dramas must be forgiven, "for they know not what they say."' Froude wrote of *Queen Mary* that he could not trust himself to say how greatly he admired the play. 'You have reclaimed,' he said, 'one more section of English History from the wilderness, and given it a form in which it will be fixed for ever. No one since Shakespeare has done that.' 'What a joy it is,' wrote Robert Browning, 'that such a poem should be, and be yours!' Gladstone and Bismarck also read *Queen Mary* with great admiration. *Harold* drew from Longfellow the tribute that it was as a voice out of the past—sonorous, strange, semi-barbaric. 'What old ancestor of yours,' he asked the poet, 'is thus speaking through you?' 'What a fine new ray of light you are entwining with your many-coloured wreath!' exclaimed Browning. Of the three plays, *Becket* was the most successful on the stage, although the poet did not live to see it. '*Becket* is a finer play than *King John*,' Irving wrote to Tennyson; nevertheless in 1879 he refused to take it up. He ventured it in 1893, believing that in the interval the public taste had changed. 'One cannot imagine a more vivid, a more perfectly faithful picture than it gives both of Henry and of Thomas. Truth in history is naturally truth in poetry; but you have made the characters of the two men shine out in a way which, while it never deviates from the impression history gives of them, goes beyond and perfects history.' So wrote James Bryce, the English historian of the United States.

The six years from 1874 to 1880 were marked on the whole by little incident but by much repose. For the most part the poet was at Aldworth, and a very vivid picture we get from his son of the old man, with his crook-handled stick and his short blue cape with velvet collar, trudging over hill and dale in all weathers, fair or foul, planting new trees, watching the progress of those already growing, conversing with the country-folk, especially poor *old* men, from whom he gently drew their thoughts on death and the future; or on one of the sunny afternoons on the lawn, walled-in by birch and pine, fir and cypress, reading to his wife, who was now an invalid, as she lay in her sofa-chair. A visitor to Aldworth has given us the following portrait of the laureate at this period:

> The figure, though slightly bent, bears the burden of its sixty-six years lightly; the dark mass of hair falling backward from the broad, high forehead, and the knightly growth fringing his lips, are but sparely streaked with silver; and the face, though rugged and deeply-lined with thought, is full of calm dignity and of a tenderness strangely at variance with his somewhat brusque tone and manner. His disregard of the conventionalities of life is thoroughly natural and unaffected. His

suit of light gray, hanging about him in many a fold like the hide of a rhinoceros, the loose, ill-fitting collar and carelessly knotted tie, the wide, low boots, are not worn, you may be sure, for artistic effect or with the foppishness of a Byron. But his chief delight is not in communion with his fellows. Rather it is to sit here in this quiet and secluded study, surrounded by a few choice books of favourite authors; and, when not working at the desk by the window that overlooks the pine glen and the purple down westward, to lounge by the larger one that looks down on the bright blossoming terrace over the dense belt of the beeches and hazels, where the whirring of night-jars sounds carelessly in the twilight, away to the gray line of undulating hills and the streak of silver sea. Whatever he is doing, the eternal pipe is ever ready at hand, and a huge tobacco-jar, big enough for an ancestral urn, on the floor beside him.

Interspersed with the home-days were a stay at Pau, where young Lionel became engaged to Eleanor Locker, who had been so long well known that she was like one of the family; a tour in the Western Pyrenees; a visit to FitzGerald at Woodbridge, and one to the Gladstones at Hawarden, where the talk was on Dante and Milton. Of this visit FitzGerald writes:

> Tennyson came suddenly upon me here six weeks ago, and many years as it was since we had met, there seemed not a day's interval between. He looked very well and very happy, having with him his eldest son, a very nice fellow, who took all care of 'papa,' as I was glad to hear him say, not 'governor,' as the phrase now is.

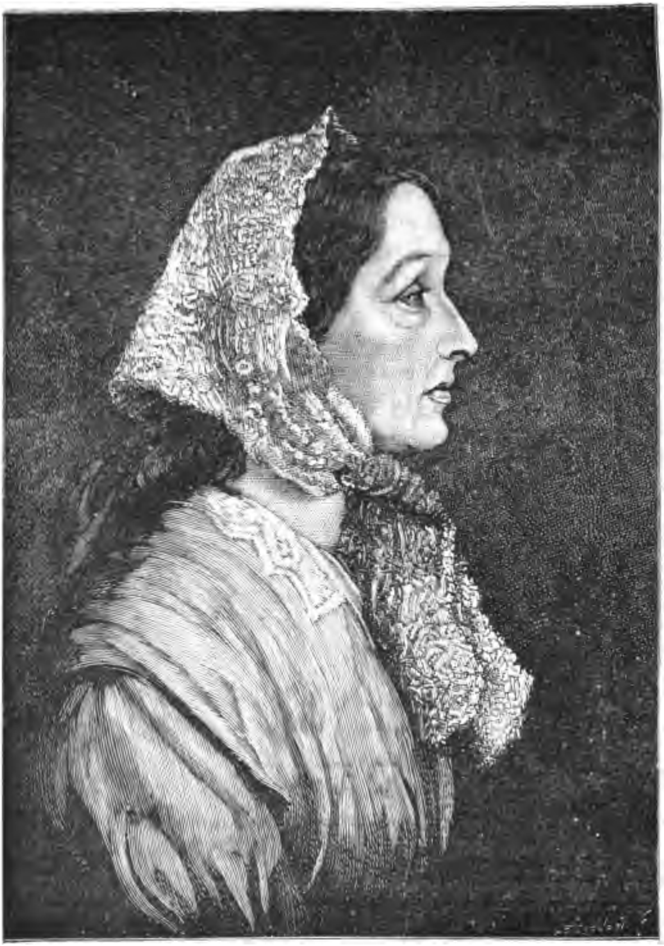
From 1875 to 1882 the poet every spring took a house in London, 'to rub our country dust off,' he said, and to be near his son Lionel, who was at the India Office, and who was married in Westminster Abbey in 1878. There he had meetings with Ruskin, who found in London everything bad, and only in the country fields healthy work for body and mind; with Lord Russell, 'Plucky Lord

John,' Tennyson called him; with General Gordon, who impressed the poet with his look of utter benevolence and *bonhomie;* with Matthew Arnold, whose poems Tennyson liked better than his excursions into biblical criticism—'Tell Mat,' he said, 'not to write any more of those prose things, like *Literature and Dogma;*' with George Eliot, to whom he said that her 'flight of Hetty in *Adam Bede* and Thackeray's gradual breaking down of Colonel Newcome were the two most pathetic things in modern prose fiction;' with Browning, who would be rallied on his harshness of rhythm and the obscurity of his poems, and who would retort, 'I cannot alter myself: the people must take me as they find me;' with Dean Stanley, who delighted the poet with his remark: 'So far from being effete, Christianity is as yet undeveloped;' with Renan, 'genial, acute, and epigrammatic;' with Joachim, the great musician, to whom he read his poem *The Revenge*, and on reaching the line—

> And the sun went down, and the stars came out far over the
> summer sea,

asked, 'Could you do that on your violin?' and last, but not least, with Mr and Mrs Carlyle, of whom Tennyson was wont to say, 'On the whole they enjoyed life together, else they would not have chaffed one another so heartily.' Hallam Tennyson records how, when Lionel's golden-haired son was brought to him, the Sage put his hands on the little fellow's head and said solemnly, 'Fair fall thee, little man, in this world and the next;' whereupon Tennyson remarked, 'Carlyle is the most reverent and most irreverent man I know!'

In the autumn of 1878 Tennyson made a tour in Ireland, revisiting Killarney. On his remarking to the boatman,



Lady Tennyson.
(From the portrait by G. F. Watts, R.A.)

'When I last was here I heard eight echoes, and now I only hear one,' the man, who had heard people quoting the bugle-song, replied, 'Why, you must be the man that brought all the money to the place.'

The spring of 1879 was shadowed by the loss of the poet's favourite brother, Charles Tennyson Turner, and in less than a month's time he was followed by his wife, Mrs Tennyson's sister. In the following year the poet consented to stand for the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow University, but withdrew on learning that he had been put forward by the Conservative party. In the same year the poet was in indifferent health, and annoyed by hearing perpetual ghostly voices, which, however, were silenced by a trip to Venice, Munich, and the Dolomites. The best picture in Venice, Tennyson said, was Venice itself. The Jewish burying-ground, carpeted with poppies and thistles, was a favourite place in which he often sauntered. At the Armenian monastery, his son tells us, a fat little monk brought him a book to sign, wherein he wrote:

With all good wishes,
And all good dishes. A. T.

Poems of these six years were *Montenegro*, which the poet put first among his sonnets; *The City Child* and *Minnie and Winnie*, two child-songs published in the *St Nicholas Magazine;* and the *Ballads and Poems*, which were dedicated to his grandson, 'Golden-hair'd Ally,' and contained, among others, *The First Quarrel; Rizpah; The Northern Cobbler*, founded on fact; *The Revenge*, about which Carlyle said, 'Eh, Alfred! you have got the grip of it;' *The Sisters*, also founded on fact; *The Children's Hospital*, a true story told him by Mary Gladstone; and *The Defence of Lucknow.* In 1879 he also published in a revised form *The Lover's Tale*, written when he was seventeen, and since its first appearance mercilessly pirated. William Allingham gives us a glimpse of the poet and his grandson, aged three about this time, taking a drive at Haslemere. Little Alfred, on his nurse's knee, had on the poet's great wideawake, while great Alfred's head was crowned with the child's straw hat with its blue ribbon.

In 1881 Tennyson had to mourn the deaths of Carlyle, who went out with the coming of spring, and of James Spedding, the editor of Lord Bacon, one of his oldest friends, who died from a cab accident. Of Spedding, FitzGerald wrote: 'He was the wisest man I have known; not the less so for plenty of the boy in him; a great sense of humour; a Socrates in life and death, which he faced with all serenity so long as consciousness lasted.' In November of the same year his poem of *Despair* was published in the *Nineteenth Century*, and subjected to bitter criticism from a public who overlooked the dramatic quality of the poem. *Hands all round*, written in 1852, was recast in February 1882, and sung to his wife's setting on the Queen's birthday in many parts of the empire. In the fall of the year Mrs Bernard Beere produced *The Promise of May* at the Globe in London, an unlucky venture, for it ran but five weeks and was roughly criticised. The advertisements had stated it to be an attack on Socialism, and on the first night an antagonistic audience gathered in the cheaper parts of the house and broke the pit doors. One evening, early in the first act, a gentleman in the stalls leapt excitedly to his feet and cried: 'I beg to protest: I beg'—— A murmur for silence interrupted him, and he sat down, saying, 'I beg your pardon; I will wait till the end of the act.' As soon as the curtain had fallen he again rose, exclaiming, 'I am an agnostic, and

I protest against Mr Tennyson's gross caricature of our creed.' From the newspapers next day it was known that the speaker was the Marquis of Queensberry, President of the British Secular Union. The protest was based on a misconception, for Tennyson had no intention of holding up to scorn and ridicule the ordinary freethinker.

In the autumn of 1883 Tennyson and Gladstone went on a voyage in Sir Donald Currie's yacht, the *Pembroke Castle;* and the poet's son has given us a delightful account of the holiday which the two greatest Englishmen of the day spent together. Politics were tabooed, but not poetry. The cruise extended from Barrow to the Isle of Man, Ailsa Craig, Islay, Oban, Tobermory, Kirkwall — where they were presented with the freedom of the burgh—the North Sea, Christiansand, Copenhagen, and home by the Nore and Gravesend. Wherever they touched there was much junketing, and more than one banquet with the royal heads of Denmark, Russia, and Greece. It was on board the *Pembroke Castle* that Gladstone offered the poet a barony. The matter was first broached to Hallam, Gladstone humorously remarking that the only difficulty in his mind was that the old man might insist on wearing his wideawake in the House of Lords. Tennyson was very nervous over the matter, not caring to alter his plain Mister; but for the honour done to literature he at last consented; and on March 11, 1884, he was introduced into the House of Lords by the Duke of Argyll and Lord Kenmore, and took his seat on the cross benches, independent of party, which he considered was counted 'too much of a god in these days.' Of the many congratulations he received, perhaps the most touching was from blind old Susan Epton, once servant at Somersby Rectory, and who was proud to think she had once borne him on her back.

In that year his first and only vote in the House of Lords was recorded for the Franchise Bill; and *Freedom* in *Macmillan's Magazine* for December was his first utterance as peer. Seldom has a peer been created by royalty with greater goodwill, as it was well known he held the first place in her esteem as a poet.

In the political crisis of 1884 Tennyson was closely associated with Mr Gladstone. Mr Gladstone had given a pledge that redistribution should follow the enlargement of the franchise at the earliest opportunity; but this was not enough for the Opposition; and, to avert a crisis, Tennyson urged him to make the main provisions of a Redistribution Bill the subject of friendly communication with the Conservatives. His suggestion he backed up with lines commencing, *Steersman, be not precipitate in thine act.* Mr Gladstone took the poet's advice, and replied that he hoped the declaration which would shortly be made by the Government would appear to Tennyson reasonable and sufficient. After the declaration was made and friendly communication opened with the Opposition, Hallam Tennyson wrote to Mr Gladstone that his father desired him to congratulate him on his explanation. 'We cannot but feel,' he added, 'that all your real friends and all true Englishmen will rejoice at your magnanimous act.'

This glimpse of the poet in politics, as well as of the intimacy between the great poet and the great statesman, has historical as well as biographical interest. The friendship was never interrupted; but in politics they were soon to part company. 'I love Mr Gladstone,' said Tennyson, 'but I hate his Home Rule policy.'

In April 1885 the exposure of the weakness of the navy called forth Tennyson's lines on *The Fleet.* *Tiresias, and other Poems,* was published at the end of the year, and dedicated to Robert Browning. It is characteristic of Tennyson's shyness that he did not tell Browning of his intention; and the latter learned the fact from a friend only after the publication of the volume. The prologue to *Tiresias* describes his old friend Edward FitzGerald, who had lived for long in seclusion at Woodbridge, favouring his intimates of former days with half-yearly epistles. Tennyson and he had not met for nine years, nor for twenty before. *Tiresias* was dedicated to him; but while it was yet in the press FitzGerald passed away. Among the poems is *The Ancient Sage*, which, it is interesting to note, contains passages of personal feeling.

Upon the marriage of Prince Henry of Battenberg, the Queen wrote to say that it would give her 'the greatest of pleasures' if Lord Tennyson 'would come over for the wedding in our village church.' She feared that he would not do so; but 'Pray come and see me,' she begged, 'when all is quiet again.' He excused himself from the wedding on account of his growing blindness, and sent his poem on the marriage.

The year 1886 brought with it a deeper sorrow than the poet had known since the death of Arthur Hallam, for in April of that year, in the Red Sea—

> Beneath a hard Arabian moon
> And alien stars—

Lionel Tennyson was laid to rest; and the father, torn to pieces because of the loss of one so full of promise and so young, sought distraction in working at *Locksley Hall sixty years after.* Lionel had been rapidly rising at the India Office, and in 1885 he had accepted an invitation from Lord Dufferin to visit India with his wife. While shooting in Assam he had caught jungle-fever, and a protracted illness ensued, which ended fatally on the voyage home.

Locksley Hall sixty years after was published in the following year, about which we have the poet's statement, 'There is not one touch of biography in it from beginning to end.'

In the summer of 1887, Lord Tennyson cruised in the *Stella*, Sir Allen Young's yacht, visiting St David's, dark Tintagel—where King Arthur as a babe had been borne in on a wave—and the Channel Islands. At St Heliers the poet met his brother Frederick, and the two lived again in the past, in Somersby Rectory garden, with its 'red honey-gooseberries' and 'golden apples,' and on the shore at Mablethorpe. During this year he published *Vastness* in *Macmillan's Magazine*, of which poem his son tells us he said, 'What matters anything in this world without full faith in the immortality of the soul and of love?'

Oliver Wendell Holmes, who visited Tennyson in 1887, has this account of his brief stay at Farringford:

> I saw the poet to the best advantage, under his own trees and walking over his own domain. He took delight in pointing out to me the finest and the rarest of his trees—and there were many beauties among them. I recalled my morning's visit to Whittier at Oak Knoll, in Danvers, a little more than a year ago, when he led me to one of his favourites, an inspiring evergreen, which shot up like a flame. I thought of the graceful American elms in front of Longfellow's house, and the sturdy English elms that stand in front of Lowell's. In this garden of England, the Isle of Wight, where everything grows with such a lavish extravagance of greenness that it seems as if it must bankrupt the soil before autumn, I felt as if weary eyes and overtasked brains might reach their happiest haven of rest.

Tennyson was now in his seventy-eighth year; his locks were thinning fast, and there were fewer dark ones; but his wonderfully noble eye had not lost its lustre. The pipe was his calumet of peace, his secret charm for abstraction, his incense to the gods. At morn, at noon, at night, alone or accompanied, the pipe was his half-way house between meals, and the sure precursor of a night's repose. To visitors he thawed but slowly even in his own room; but the magic of a third pipeful usually sufficed to loose his tongue, and if the topic stirred him he would pour forth fine rolling periods in sturdy old English accents. As the conversation warmed, his puffs would come fast and thick; and as the charge in each pipe was exhausted, he would break the shank, drop it into a vase, and fill a clean 'churchwarden,' for Tennyson had a lordly whim never to smoke the same pipe twice.

CHAPTER X.

SUNSET AND EVENING STAR.

A SERIOUS illness prostrated Tennyson in the autumn of 1888, an attack of rheumatic gout, brought on by exposure to the weather. It was a time of great anxiety, for the sickness was nigh unto death; but the strong frame and mind of the poet were not easily overcome in the struggle, and he had much comfort in his illness from letters of sympathy written by his friends—Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol, Robert Browning, the Duke of Argyll, and others. Strangers also were assiduous in sending prescriptions and cures for the malady, burnt cork under his bed and a diet of snails being among the number. When the following May came round he had so far recovered as to go for a cruise in Lord Brassey's famous yacht, the *Sunbeam;* and his doctor, Sir Andrew Clark, pronounced him healthy and sound, remarking that he could not see where the door would open for his exit from this life.

On his eightieth birthday Tennyson received his last letter from Robert Browning:

29 DE VERE GARDENS, 5 *Aug.* 1889.

MY DEAR TENNYSON,—To-morrow is your birthday—indeed a memorable one. Let me say I associate myself with the universal pride of our country in your glory, and in its hope that for many and many a year we may have your very self among us — secure that your poetry will be a wonder and delight to all those appointed to come after. And for my own part, let me further say, I have loved you dearly. May God bless you and yours.

Demeter, and other Poems, appeared in December 1889, and in the same year he also published the three poems, *To Edward Lear*, *The Daisy*, and *The Palace of Art*, illustrated by Edward Lear. To Tennyson, 'Demeter' was one of the most beautiful types of motherhood. In the same volume, *Far, far away*, with its melody of distant bells, and *The Oak*, 'clean cut like a Greek epigram,' were favourites. *Crossing the Bar* was written in his eighty-first year, and came to him in a moment. A few days before his death he said to his son, 'Mind you put *Crossing the Bar* at the end of all editions of my poems.' The 'Pilot,' he explained, is 'that Divine and Unseen who is always guiding us.' On the day that his volume appeared Browning died, and Tennyson mourned his loss as few could. The death of William Allingham, the Irish poet, also removed another friend.

On June 13, 1890, Lord Tennyson and his wife kept the fortieth anniversary of their wedding-day. The old man was merry with all the exuberance of youth; and, indeed, his son tells us how at eighty-two he would defy his friends to get up twenty times from a low chair without touching it with their hands, and then he would perform the feat himself. He was continually receiving proofs of the enthusiasm his poems stirred up in men. Some of the proofs were very acceptable, others were not. In the latter class might be included that American who worked his passage across the Atlantic in a cattle-boat that he might recite *Maud* to the author. Tennyson's sense of pity permitted the man to achieve his end, but the recitation cost the poet not a little suffering. However, he paid his passage back to America. More pleasing was the story of a Japanese poet, over eighty, who got a gentleman travelling in Japan to read to him pieces of *In Memoriam* he had copied out. Though he did not know the words, the music spoke to him, he said, in a tongue that could not be mistaken. 'We talk to each other across the world.'

In 1892 *The Foresters* was successfully produced in New York by Miss Ada Rehan and Mr Augustin Daly's company. Irving had considered the play not sensational enough for an English audience. The summer was partly spent in a yachting cruise again to Jersey, to the poet's brother Frederick, to talk over old times once more. In the fall of the year he completed the revision of the proofs of his new volume, *Death of Œnone*, &c., a book which he considered to be his last will and testament to the world.

Throughout the whole year it had been evident that the life was ebbing, and, as September wore on, that he was nearing the end. He was interested in the arrangements for the production of his *Becket*, but his craving was for Shakespeare. 'Where is my Shakespeare?' he constantly asked. 'I must have my Shakespeare.' He talked to the doctor about death, what a shadow this life was, and how men clung to what was after all but a small part of this great world's life. He listened with deepest feeling to the story of a villager of ninety who, when dying, had had his bedridden wife carried in to where he lay, and had pressed his shrunken hand on hers, huskily whispering, 'Come soon.'

'True faith!' murmured the dying poet, with tears in his voice.

In the last days of September he received a chill whilst out driving; influenza supervened, and gout complications added to the gravity of the case; and on 5th October he realised the near approach of death. The last of his days has thus been described by an eye-witness:

The morning rose in almost unearthly splendour over the hills and valleys on which the windows of Aldworth House look out. From the mullioned window of the room where the poet lay he could look down upon the peaceful fields, the silent hills beyond them, and the sky above, which was a blue so deep and pure as is rarely seen in this country.

Lord Tennyson woke ever and again out of the painless, dreamy state into which he had fallen, and looked out into the silence and the sunlight.

In the afternoon, in one of his waking moments, during which he was always perfectly conscious, he asked for his Shakespeare, and with his own hands turned the leaves till he had found *Cymbeline.* His eyes were fixed on the pages, but whether and how much he read no one will ever know, for again he lay in dream or slumber, or let his eyes rest on the scene outside.

As the day advanced a change came over the scene, a change almost awful to those who watched the deathbed. Slowly the sun went down, the blue died out of the sky, and upon the valley below there fell a perfectly white mist. The hills put on their purple garments to watch this strange, white stillness; there was not a sound in the air, and, high above, the clear, cloudless sky shone like a pale, glittering dome. All nature seemed to be watching, waiting.

Then the stars came out and looked in at the big mullioned window, and those within saw them grow brighter and brighter, till at last a moon—a harvest moon for splendour, though it was an October moon—sailed slowly up and flooded the room with golden light. The bed on which Lord Tennyson lay now very near to the gate of death, and with his left hand still resting on

his Shakespeare, was in deep darkness; the rest of the room lit up with the glory of the night, which poured in through the uncurtained windows. And thus, without pain, without a struggle, the greatest of England's poets passed away.

His son, bending over him, whispered his own prayer: 'God accept him: Christ receive him!'

Cymbeline, the play of Shakespeare's he loved so dearly, and a laurel wreath from Virgil's tomb were placed by him in the coffin. Lady Tennyson left the question of the place of burial in the Dean of Westminster's hands. 'Decide as you think best,' she said. 'If it is thought better, let him have the flag of England on his coffin, and rest in the churchyard of Farringford, the dear place where his happiest days have been passed. Only let the flag represent the beloved Queen and the nation and the empire he loved so dearly.' But Westminster Abbey was the only possible resting-place, and there, on Wednesday the 12th of October, Lord Tennyson was buried. Before the body left Aldworth on the 11th, there came a plaintive whimpering from the other side of a laurel-hedge which separates the servants' quarters from the gravel sweep in front of the house. It was the poet's favourite dog, a Russian wolfhound, whining and straining at its chain as it tried to peer through the hedge. The coffin of its master was placed on a small shooting-wagonette and bedecked with Virginia creeper and ivy leaves. A most impressive funeral service in Westminster Abbey crowned a noble life and noble death. Three years before, England had thus honoured Robert Browning; but the greater crowd and noisier bustle in the street were the outward sign and symbol of Lord Tennyson's greater popularity.

Lady Tennyson survived her husband a full four years, and passed quietly away in 1897. Frederick Tennyson, the poet's eldest brother, died in the early part of 1898. Mrs Browning considered his poems finer than those of his brother Charles. By his will, Tennyson appointed his son Hallam his literary executor, and settled Aldworth and Farringford to his use for life, with remainder to his sons in order of their seniority, and, failing them, to the sons of Lionel Tennyson. During her life Lady Tennyson was to enjoy Aldworth and the income of the residue of his estate. The value of his personal estate was £57,206. Browning had left personality in England to the value of £16,777.

Natural it is to ask what, when a hundred years or more have gone by, will be Tennyson's rank in the hierarchy of Parnassus? But of this the days to come will be the wisest witnesses. Yet, were his influence now to wane, his work already accomplished would ever remain a splendid monument. Few know how much they owe to his voice of hope and serenity which has sounded in English ears for half-a-century. His high ideal will always prove the most valuable note of inspiration in his poetry, and to this his niece, Miss Weld, bears testimony. 'No poet, perhaps,' she says, 'has ever come so close to the type of the seer prophet of the Old Testament as Tennyson, for I think none was ever so penetrated through and through as he was with the sense of the divine source of the gift of poetry imparted to him. He told me that the sense was almost awful to him in its intensity, because it made him feel as a priest who can never leave the sanctuary, and whose every word must be consecrated to the service of Him who had touched his lips with the fire of heaven which was to enable him to speak in God's name to his age. And so, he went on to say, nothing he had ever written seemed to him to have reached the standard of perfection short of which he must never rest; all he could hope was that he had brought men a little nearer to God.' As he has been to our own age, surely Tennyson will be also to those to follow—one of the light-bearers of the world.

THE END.

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